

If you'd like to, please open up to Psalm 44, that's where our scripture reading is this morning.

For the choir director, a maskill of the sons of Korah.

O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us the work that you did in their days, in the days of old.

You, with your own hand, drove out the nations.

Then you planted them.

You afflicted the peoples, then you spread them abroad.

For by their own sword they did not possess the land and their own arm did not save them.

But your right hand and your arm and the light of your presence for you favored them.

You are my king, O God.

Command victories for Jacob.

Through you we will push back our adversaries.

Through your name we will trample down those who rise up against us.

For I will not trust in my bow, nor will my sword save me.

But you have saved us from our adversaries, and you have put to shame those who hate us.

In God we have boasted all day long, and we will give thanks to your name forever.

Yet you have rejected us and brought us to dishonor and do not go out with our enemies.

You cause us to turn back from the adversary and those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves.

You give us as sheep to be eaten and have scattered us among the nations.

You sell your people cheaply and have not profited by their sale.

You make us a reproach to our neighbors, a scoffing and a derision to those around us.

You make us a byword among the nations, a laughing stock among the peoples.

All day long, my dishonor is before me and my humiliation has overwhelmed me.

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

All this has come upon us.

But we have not forgotten you, and we have not dealt falsely with your covenant.

Our heart has not turned back, and our steps have not deviated from your way.

Yet you have crushed us in a place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death.

If we had forgotten the name of our God or extended our hands to a strange God, would not God find this out?

For he knows the secrets of the heart.

But for your sake we are killed all day long.

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

Arouse yourself.

Why do you sleep, O Lord?

Awake.

Do not reject us forever.

Why do you hide your face and forget our affliction and our oppression?

For our soul has sunk down into the dust.

Our body cleaves to the earth.

Rise up.

Be our help.

and redeem us for the sake of your loving kindness.

Thanks, George.

We're looking at God's heart for the nations from the Psalms.

The question, or one of the things that this psalm is addressing in particular, is how can we have a heart for the nations, how can we have a love for the nations that's willing to sacrifice to bring the gospel and the good news to them, sacrifice our own comfort, our own possessions, our life even, to bring the gospel to them, when it seems like

the nation we're in or the nations that we're called to seem to hate us, seem to hate us, seem to want harm rather than good for us.

How can we continue to move forward and bring the gospel to them and make sacrifices necessary to do that?

That's kind of what this psalm is addressing, so we'll land there eventually.

But this is one of the handful of psalms in the book of Psalms that doesn't have a real happy ending, doesn't have any section of praise and adoration and happy, happy, joy, joy type section.

So...

Yeah, we're going to tackle it today together.

I just want to acknowledge, too, that like half the church is on vacation today, so it's okay.

It'll be just us.

It'll be great.

I mean, like the whole climber row is gone except for George.

George is the only climber rep here.

So way to go, George.

Appreciate it.

Thanks for reading.

I would just say, too, as before we move into it, since I'm just off topic anyways.

I always appreciate being missed when I'm gone, even when people know why I'm gone.

So shoot somebody a text, let them know you missed them here today, and that you're looking forward to seeing them when they get back.

And I don't know, maybe you'll find out something else as well.

I'm going to stop talking.

Let's pray, and we'll stick to the notes this morning.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word.

Lord, we're thankful that you have shown us and revealed to us great and wonderful things about yourself, about your people, and about us even individually, Lord, in your word.

We ask that you give us eyes to see, that you give us ears to hear, that you would help us to grow in our knowledge of you, but more importantly, Lord, that you would help us to grow in love for you and your truth.

We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Everybody loves a winner.

I mean, most of the reason that we don't like soccer here in America is because we lose at it, right?

So we just dismiss it.

It's not a real sport.

We just ignore it.

We like to pretend that it's not even there.

But everybody loves a winner.

I had one mega church pastor tell me somewhat recently that people just wanna feel like they're winning at the Christian life.

And he gave me that line as he was explaining why their church provides like a seven or eight point checklist

of like things you could feel good about the Christian life and your walk in the Christian life if you do these eight things, right?

And most of them ended with like volunteering in the church, giving to the church, stuff that also promoted the institution of the church as well.

Well, people, I think there's some truth to it.

I do think that there's truth that we wanna feel like winners.

And too often, churches in particular are,

tell people what they want to hear because they got to somehow spin that what's happening here is a win.

What's happening here, particularly at this local church within these four walls, is a win.

We'll preach things like, if you are following God, you'll look like a winner.

If you're following God and you come and you hear what we have to say and you do what we say, that you'll look like a winner.

You'll have health, you'll have wealth, you'll have success in everything you do.

Or we'll preach that if you do these 10 things, you're a good Christian and you can feel good about yourself.

You can go home and then do whatever you want because you did these 10 things and you can rest easy at night.

But if you don't do these 10 things, then what?

What about those times when we're pretty much doing everything right and things still go wrong?

I think where a lot of these things, especially when we fall into the trap of telling people what they want to hear, where the veil gets removed, where the wool gets pulled off of people's eyes and they see it for what it is, is when things go wrong when we're doing everything that we're supposed to do.

It is true that God sometimes gives us consequences for our sin to correct us.

God allows us to feel the consequences of our sin to help put us back on the straight and narrow.

But there are times when we're doing everything right and God still allows bad things to happen.

James Johnston reminds us, a commentator on the book of Psalms, but sometimes God allows us to go through hard things even when we are obedient and walking closely with him.

Job suffered precisely because he was the best man God found on earth, Job 1.8.

Joseph went to prison precisely because he honored God in Genesis.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh precisely because his ministry was so successful.

And this is what's happening in Psalm 44, right?

Israel's been attacked.

Many of the people of Israel have been killed and taken into captivity or taken prisoner.

Now we're not told or the Psalm isn't linked to a specific event in the history books, you know, 1 Kings, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and some of the prophets.

We're not, this Psalm isn't linked to any one specific event.

It just talks generically about Israel being attacked and taken prisoner.

So while we don't know the specific events, we do see that in the context of the psalm, like if you go to Psalm 42 and Psalm 43, we see the king of Israel crying out to the Lord, bemoaning and weeping over the fact that this calamity, that this hardship has come on Israel.

And then in chapter 44 here, we see the king not only talking on his own behalf or not only expressing his own grief, but he's helping the people express grief to God for what's happened.

As he does that, we'll see this morning that when God's people suffer, they still honor God by trusting his strength, his sovereignty, and his steadfast love.

So what the king is doing is helping his people, even in this time of suffering, before God to trust God's strength, his sovereignty, and his steadfast love.

I think we see that the king and the people lean on God's strength here in the first section of the psalm.

If you look at 44.1-3, the psalmist begins, "'O God, we have heard with our ears.'"

Our fathers have told us what deeds you performed in their days and the days of old.

You with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted, or them, our fathers, you planted.

You afflicted the peoples, but them you set free.

For not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them.

But your right hand and your arm and the light of your face, for you delighted in them.

Now, like I said before, the psalm doesn't begin or end with a flurry of praise like many of the psalms that we've seen and we will see throughout the rest of the summer.

But it still magnifies God.

The focus of the psalm is to bring glory and attention and honor to God and his name.

So the psalmist opens up this psalm by remembering ways in which God has helped his forefathers.

Much like Psalm, what were we in last week?

Psalm 9?

Somebody should know.

I feel like I should know what Psalm we preached last week.

But that Psalm that we preached last week opened up similarly.

This is why I got to stick to the notes.

I look a lot smarter when I stick to the notes.

So the reason he opens up in this weird way, he says, oh God, we have heard with our ears is because copies of the scripture were few and far between.

Very few people were reading the scriptures at that time.

In fact, most people consumed the scriptures or took in the scriptures when they were read publicly in worship services.

So he opens up remembering the ways that God has helped his forefathers.

And the psalmist heard from the scriptures as they were read out loud to the congregation, how God had inflicted plagues on Egypt, right?

How he had split the Red Sea and brought his people through it.

How he had piled up the waters in the Jordan and brought his people through that and given them the promised land.

In fact, he might've had in mind this passage that he would have heard out of Joshua 24, right?

He says, this is God speaking.

Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt and you came to the sea and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt.

Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived on the other side of the Jordan.

They fought with you and I gave them into your hand and you took possession of their land and I destroyed them before you.

Then Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel.

And then he, Balak, sent and invited Balaam, the son of Baor, to curse you.

But I would not listen to Balaam.

Indeed, he blessed you.

So I delivered you out of his hand.

And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho.

And the leaders of Jericho fought against you.

And also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

And I gave them into your hand.

And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites.

It was not by your sword or by your bow.

I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them.

You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.

So we're off to a good start here, right?

This is a beautiful expression of humility, spiritual humility, even maturity as the psalmist recognizes all that God has done for his forefathers.

It wasn't their brilliance, wasn't their military acumen.

It was God that was fighting on their behalf and bringing them into the land.

He then continues this good start that he has, and he recognizes not only did his fathers rely on God's strength, but also that they are and have relied on God's strength as well.

Look at verses 4 to 8.

It says, you are my king, oh God, ordain salvation for Jacob.

Through you, we push down our foes.

Through your name, we tread down those who rise up against us.

For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me, but you have saved us from our foes and have put to shame those who hate us.

In God, we have boasted continually and we will give thanks to your name forever, Selah.

So we have the king here leading his people and praising God, humbly leading the people and praising God and acknowledging that all that God has done for them.

They didn't pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

They didn't earn these victories and their own cunning and bravery.

God fought for them, right?

God fought on their behalf.

Therefore, they were victorious.

This reflects Proverbs 21, 31.

This is another one of my dad's Psalms.

I like pointing it out, or Proverbs 21.

I like pointing out when I can quote some of the Proverbs my dad would quote at me growing up.

So the horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

We can be ready, we can fight the battle, but ultimately it's God working on our behalf.

So we come to the break here, the Selah and the Psalm, and everything's right with the world.

The people who trust in God and hope in him are winning, and they have won.

The bad guys are losing.

God's getting all the praise and the glory.

But then the psalm takes kind of an unexpected turn here in verse 9.

And the psalmist moves from trusting God's strength and recounting God's strength to believing his sovereignty in verses 9 to 14.

But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies.

You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoiled.

You have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations.

You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them.

You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us.

You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples.

All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face, at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger."

So the psalmist says a couple of hard things here, at least difficult to wrap our minds around.

They're not hard in the sense that they're very clear.

One, the psalmist says that God caused these things.

He recounts all of this disaster that's come upon Israel, and he's saying God caused them.

The thing right up front that you can't miss in this section, and the major takeaway of the section, the reason for the repetition within the section, is that God has caused it.

He says, you did this, you did this, you did this.

Six times he says, you did these things to us.

Now, he's not saying that God is the one that directly killed and imprisoned them, right?

He's not stupid.

This other nation came in, killed them and imprisoned them.

He knows it was this other nation that attacked them that was directly doing these things to them.

And yet,

without getting into a complicated theological speculation of secondary and indirect causation, he knows and he acknowledges before God, this is a prayer, a song to God, that God was sovereignly in control of the nation that was doing the killing and the imprisoning.

He also doesn't parse subtleties between, you know, God allowed this nation to come attack us, God ordained this nation to come and attack us, or he decreed that this nation would come and attack us.

He simply states that God has done this to his people.

God has sold us.

God has brought us a sheep to be slaughtered.

God did these things, which gets to the crux of the issue in that the psalmist is holding God responsible for all of the bad things that are happening to his people.

The psalmist holds God responsible for this tragedy, for this attack that has come upon his people.

Again, the psalmist is not saying that this invading nation is not responsible for their crimes.

He's not saying that.

They will answer for their sin.

But he also knows that God is in control and he firmly roots the shame and the misery that has come upon his people in God's lap.

Now you might say that that doesn't make any sense.

How can it be both and?

I'm not gonna answer that question this morning.

The psalm doesn't answer that question, right?

The psalmist just says, God, this was you, right?

This was you when this nation came and killed us and imprisoned us.

God has done these things.

God is responsible for them.

But notice what he hasn't done yet.

He hasn't questioned God's integrity.

He hasn't demanded an explanation either.

The psalmist, as he's laying this in God's lap, as he's rightfully pointing to God as the one who is sovereignly in control of their trial and suffering, he believes the best.

He still believes the best about God, and he still trusts in God's steadfast love.

Look at verses 17 to 26.

He says,

Yet for your sake, we are killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

Awake, why are you sleeping, O Lord?

Rouse yourself.

Do not reject us forever.

Why do you hide your face?

Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

For our soul is bowed down to the dust.

Our belly clings to the ground.

Rise up, come to our help.

Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

If you look at 17 to 22, I read both sections there, but if you look at 17 to 22, again, the psalmist has not demanded an explanation of God.

He hasn't said, why?

Why is this happening?

Why, God, are you allowing this?

But he knows in this section here that he can rule out one reason for their suffering.

They're not suffering because they've broken God's covenant.

It's like this group of people that he's talking about and representing here in this prayer, he says, we have not broken your covenant.

They've remembered God and they've worshiped him alone and then they've walked in his ways.

They've done everything right, right?

They've done everything right as far as the covenant goes.

And I don't think this psalmist here is bringing this up saying, hey, we've held up our end of the bargain.

I don't think he's saying that because he's complaining to God.

Rather, he's examining and reflecting, right?

So his first instinct when suffering comes, which is a good instinct, is to do some self-examination.

Do I need to repent?

Have we broken the covenant?

Have we worshiped other gods?

Do I need to repent?

Is this suffering the consequence of my own sin, our own sin?

And then it comes to the conclusion that he doesn't.

He doesn't need to repent.

This is not a result.

This suffering has not come as a result of his own sin.

He's been faithful.

The people have been faithful to God.

And yet God has brought the suffering into their lives.

Which means, and this is a hopeful yet difficult truth, this means that his relationship with God is not contractual, meaning that it's not a business contract.

God is not a vending machine where you can put in obedience and good works and get out blessing and an easy life.

James Johnston talks about this contractual relationship with God.

He says, if I come to God with this kind of contract in mind, what happens when things go wrong?

I get angry either at myself or at God.

I'll get angry at myself if I don't think I kept my side of the bargain.

I decide these troubles in my life mean that I failed somehow.

I haven't done enough, given enough, been passionate enough.

As a result, I get angry at myself and depressed.

On the other hand, I'll get angry at God if I think I have obeyed.

I did everything right, and he didn't keep up his side of the bargain.

I think to myself, I worship you, God, and you let me down.

The fact that bad things are happening to good people here is a reminder that God's love and blessing isn't something that is bought and sold.

It's not something you buy with a good life, serving the church, giving money to the church, helping old ladies across the street.

It's not something that is earned.

God is not bound or manipulated by your and my sense of fairness and justice.

I did this, therefore I believe I deserve this kind of treatment from God.

And quite frankly, deep down, we know we do not want God to treat us as we really deserve.

We think that we can cordon off part of our life and then earn God's favor with some other stuff over here and just don't look at this over there.

When the psalmist takes it, he takes this contractual idea and rejects it, right?

Relating to God is not like a business contract.

He takes that and then he takes it one step further, right?

So God, you're not treating us as we deserve here, right?

We followed you and we kept the covenant and yet somehow you're still bringing bad things into our lives.

Not only does he say we didn't deserve it, but he said, actually, this stuff is coming into our lives because of you.

Look at verse 22.

Yet for your sake...

For your sake, we are killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

The psalmist takes it one step further at the end of this section and says, it's not because of them and their sin that this is happening, but it's because they follow God and identify with Yahweh.

Listen, any church or teacher that teaches or implies that if you follow God, everything is going to be great for you in this life, that you'll have health, wealth, and smooth sailing if you just have enough faith, they're not accurately teaching the scriptures.

This is just one example, right?

Where following God directly leads to suffering in this life.

Listen, we will be healed.

We will be prosperous when we're with the Lord for eternity.

But just as Jesus suffered in this life for God's glory and the good of God's people, God often calls us to difficulty and to trial for his sake and for our good, right?

For his glory and for our good.

Seeing clearly that our relationship with God is not contractual, right?

So this is not a tit-for-tat type of thing here in our relationship with God.

I scratch your back, you scratch mine.

The psalmist moves to an appeal to God's steadfast love.

Look at verses 23 to 26 again.

It says, Awake!

Why are you sleeping, O Lord?

Rouse yourself.

Do not reject us forever.

Why do you hide your face?

Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

For our souls bow down to the dust, our belly clings to the ground.

Rise up, come to our help.

Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

We have a lot of hyperbole here, a lot of hyperbole that a lot of the prophets use to mock the false gods of the Old Testament.

You think Elijah, you know, like when he's calling down on Mount Carmel, when he's calling down fire onto the altars and he's got this, you know, I don't know,

a battle with the false prophets of Baal, and they're like, who can call down fire first?

And he's mocking the false prophets.

He's like, hey, maybe he's asleep.

Maybe he's in the bathroom.

You know, like, what gives?

And the psalmist here is not mocking God, but he's kind of egging them on, right?

He's egging them on, and he's speaking in a hyperbolic way, like, hey...

Time to wake up, right?

Time to come down.

You know, we haven't broken the covenant here.

This is in your lap.

But he does it aware of and rooted in and grounded in God's steadfast love.

After reminding himself of God's sovereign power, after assuring himself that his relationship with God is intact, that it's not broken because he broke the covenant, the psalmist calls God to action.

And you would think that after six verses of self-justification, where he's like, we're not doing anything wrong here.

We're keeping the covenant.

You would think after six verses of that, that he would call God to action again,
in order to clear his name, right?

In order to clear the psalmist's name and the people's name, or because God owes it to us.

Like, hey, come avenge your righteous people here, right?

Come show us to be righteous like we really are.

But he doesn't do that, right?

He doesn't appeal to God's justice.

He doesn't appeal to their own righteousness, right?

Rather, and the reason he doesn't do that is because his relationship with God is not contractual, right?

He's not appealing to this tit-for-tat contractual relationship, business-like relationship with God because God doesn't treat his people as they deserve.

The last line of the Psalm tells us that he treats us better than we deserve, right?

Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

The psalmist believes two things.

It's clear that the psalmist believes two things, at least two things in this last section.

One, that the suffering is really bad, right?

This is really bad suffering and it's genuinely not good, right?

God detests the suffering.

He knows how God feels about the suffering and God needs to do something about it.

But two, he also knows that God sees his people's suffering and that it breaks his heart, right?

And if God is choosing not to act, right?

It's his steadfast love.

His love hasn't changed.

The suffering changes nothing about God's love for his people.

And if he's not removing the suffering right now, it's not because he's punishing us.

It's not because he's not able to remove the suffering.

It must be because God has something better for us than removing the suffering right now.

He looks at God's sovereignty.

He looks at the fact that their relationship with God is intact.

And he knows God's steadfast love that doesn't change.

And he comes to the conclusion that the only reason this hasn't been taken away is because there's something better, right?

That God's love is being expressed in a way that's better than I can understand right now.

Jim Hamilton puts it this way.

He says,

with complicated theological explanations, nor resorts to sinful anger.

He responds to his pain by fleeing to the Father because he knows God's love.

When God's people suffer, they honor God by trusting his strength, his sovereignty, and his steadfast love.

I love this psalm because all of this hopeful truth is not just explicit at the beginning and the end, like in some psalms.

Sometimes we need that explicit hopeful truth.

But this hopeful truth is just simmering beneath a lot of really strong and direct language.

Like if I went back and read the psalm for you again, you'd be like, no, where did we get sovereignty and steadfast love from?

You know?

Like this is a really strong language about the suffering that they're going through.

The psalmist doesn't numb himself to the pain as he reminds himself of this truth.

Rather, he's expressing his pain to the Lord in light of truth, right?

He never gets unrighteously angry.

He never crosses over into falsehood.

Rather, he walks this beautiful and frankly inspired by the Holy Spirit balance of expressing his pain

while also comforting himself and his people with truth at the same time.

And quite frankly, the intense realities that he's describing and the direct language that he uses to describe suffering and the great hope that he has, it only gets stronger this side of the cross.

Like Paul famously quotes this passage in Romans 8, 35 to 37.

He says, "'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'

Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

Knowing all of these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

A little bit earlier, Paul says, if God is for us, who can be against us?

And that is the heartbeat of the psalm.

And if God is for us, who can be against us?

The thing is, the who can be against us is right in the psalmist's face.

He's like, they're against us and they're here, right?

They're here, they've taken us.

Now, okay, God, it's time to be for us, right?

It's time to be for us and show us how you're for us.

But sometimes we don't see how he's for us.

Sometimes we don't get to see the win right now.

Sometimes it just looks like a loss and overwhelmingly like a loss.

But one day we will see.

That's what Paul tells us in Romans 8.

One day we will see that right now we are more than conquerors and one day we will experience that in full.

Tim Keller in his really great book on suffering, I would encourage everyone to read it.

It's one of the best on suffering.

It says this,

Often we can see how bad things work together for good.

The problem is that we can only glimpse this sometimes in a limited number of cases.

But why could it not be that God allowed evil because it will bring us all to a far greater glory and joy than we would have had otherwise?

Isn't it possible that the eventual glory and joy we will know will be infinitely greater than it would have been had there been no evil?

What if that future world will somehow be greater for having once been broken and lost?

If such is the case, that would truly mean the utter defeat of evil.

Evil would not just be an obstacle to our beauty and bliss, but it will have only made it better.

Evil would have accomplished the very opposite of what it intended.

That's how you more than conquer.

Conquer is already an absolute term.

Conquer means you won.

The other guys defeated.

How do you more than conquer?

The way that you more than conquer is you not only defeat your enemy, but you make your enemy serve you.

And that's exactly what Christ did to sin, death, and evil.

He turns it on its head and he makes it serve our joy and our good.

This is our hope.

One of the ways we share this hope with the nations and our neighbors this week is by responding exactly the way the psalmist did to suffering and trials and difficulty in our lives.

We trust God's strength, his sovereignty, and his steadfast love.

Let's pray.

God, would you increase our faith?

Lord, we're not asking to see why.

We're not asking to see how right now.

But Lord, we're bringing our pain and our suffering and our difficulties and all of their terribleness and ugliness and all of their rawness.

And Lord, we lay them at your feet.

And we trust that you are able to remove these things.

Lord, we trust that because we stand in the shed blood of Jesus and his righteousness alone,

that you desire to remove these things, that our relationship with you is intact.

And Lord, we trust that if you have not removed them right now, that you desire something even greater than just the removal of this pain in our life.

Lord, we trust that your steadfast love has not changed, and it will not change.

And Lord, we ask with the psalmist for you to awake, to rise up, to bring the relief and redemption.

Lord, even to bring the final relief and final culmination of the redemption you purchased for us in the return of your son so that we can dwell with you forever in that perfect kingdom where you are our light,

where there's no need for the sun because you are our light and where death and pain and sickness are no more.

We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.