

Psalms 71 "David's Prayer in His Old Age" June 10, 2018

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalms 71.

There's no introductory signature on this Psalm, although most scholars, those who are well-versed in Hebrew, agree that David's fingerprints are all over this Psalm. It is certainly his style of writing, unique to him. David wrote this in his old age. And just so that you know how insightful I am, I learned that from verse 9 where it says "Don't cast me off in my old age." And again in verse 18, "Now that I am old and grayheaded."

So here's a Psalm written by David, we believe, when he is much older, and yet he looks back with some peace about the life that he has lived, a measure of satisfaction over his walk with the Lord, and yet he faces some enduring kind of besetting trials that seem to be going on to the bitter end. One thing for sure, life's battles don't go away when you get older. Even when you possessed your full strength as a young person, things don't change much. Well, I'll get older, it will be easier. It doesn't get easier.

One thing David had going for him was an extremely good memory. In fact, there's only 24 verses in this Psalm, but there are 50 quotes from other Psalms. It's almost like these are David's greatest hits. He quotes himself a lot. But I take mention of that because before you get too old, if you can fill your mind with the scriptures, they'll stay with you. We were on our Footsteps with Paul tour last year, and we had quite a drive to the coast out of Athens, and so the bus was kind of quiet, so I put on my phone "American Pie." Remember that song? And the whole bus sang every word. That's ridiculous information. I remember songs from the '60s like they were yesterday. I can't tell you what I had for dinner Thursday night. I had to ask my wife. There's something about filling your mind with the things of God so that they stay there, and it does seem like for David, you know, now that he's running at less than full measure, if you will, the words of God are still overflowing from his life.

We read in verse 1, "In you, Lord, I have put my trust; let me never be put to shame. And deliver me in your righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline your ear to me, and save me. Be my strong refuge, to which I will resort continually; you've given the

commandment to save me, you are my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth. By You I have been upheld from my birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise will continually be to You." David on his last lap has spent most of his energy in his life serving the Lord. He finds his strength waning. His course in front of him looks more like an obstacle course than the finish line, but he begins this Psalm by asking God for the stamina to finish well, and he does so based on his understanding of who God is; His character, His compassion that he had learned to trust in over the years, that had never failed. God had never failed him. And notice the words that he uses. You're my hope, my trust, my strong refuge, you're always available, you're my rock, you're my fortress, you're the attending Lord since the day that I was born. You're the Lord. Yahweh. The One that makes promises that He keeps.

David Livingstone's ministry ended in a place called Chitambo in a village in Africa. And by the time he found himself there after years of ministry, he was left virtually alone, except for a couple of native supply carriers. He was sick. His feet were filled with ulcers, he had internal bleeding. His last entry into his diary as a Brit was, he wrote, "Knocked up quite," which meant I'm not feeling too good. That night the rain began to fall. The porters had built him kind of a shelter for him to be able to lie down and sleep. When the three men that were with him to care for him came to find him in the morning, they found him dead on his knees beside his cot. "Thou valiant soldier and warrior for the Lord had run his course well." David finds himself in that kind of position: Weak, kind of running out of gas, but wanting to have God's sustained grace. Notice he says in verse 3, "Be my strong refuge, that I can resort to continually."

You know, the older folks get, the more need they have to feel secure. Certainly, their natural defenses against life's injuries are waning. Most of the time they've retired from work and their health is usually poorer. Their friends, their close friends are either, sick or dying. Your mind tends to not function at a good capacity. Your income is greatly reduced. And David finds himself like most folks that are older: Vulnerable and needing confidence. But yet he also knew where he stood with God. Notice he says, "You have been the One that have ordered my salvation. You have given commandment to save me. And because of that, I know that You are going to take care of me. But be my strong tower." The cry of a weak man for a habitation that is secure. And because he sees the Lord as his strong tower, the feebleness of an older life isn't really affecting him much. I love the words "You've given commandment to save me."

That's a wonderful picture. When you decide I'm going to make it, I'll make it. How can You not know that?

David's misery in verse 4 was still found at the hands of others. He doesn't really say who they were, he just describes them as wicked, unrighteous and cruel. Older, probably easier to be taken advantage of. The fighting spirit might be gone, but God's not. So he turns in verse 4 and 5, in verse 6, to the Lord with great confidence, his mind wandering back to happier days when things were easier. He says there in verse 6 that "You have upheld me since the day I was born." I trusted when I was a young man. I relied on You since day one. He looks back to older times or long -- younger days, I should say, when he could trust the Lord in all that he did.

The cool thing about getting older in the Lord is that you have a lot of experience. You have the experience of years of trusting God. That you didn't have as a young person. There's nothing new under the sun. Satan's tactics don't change. God never forsakes you. He never forgets to help. His timing is perfect. His love is unchanging. All of those details of God's relationship with you should be more subtle as you get older, especially if you've been at it for decades like David had. Which is why it's so, vital for you that are older to share with those in the church that are younger what God has done for you. It's why we have those ministries during the summer where we pair older with younger, because there's something to be said for someone that's been around with the Lord for a long time. It's good to learn from others who've been there already.

I think the statesman Benjamin Disraeli, he wrote on his deathbed, "Youth was a mistake. Manhood is a struggle. Old age is a regret." That's no way to go. But not for David. He looked at both extremities of his life, the older days and the younger days, and notice there is joy in both of them. He knew that God had planned things well. He writes in verse 6, I've been with You since the beginning. You've been with me. I'm going to just continue to worship You. Praise will be the order of the day. It's one of those heritages of a well-lived life. I think it was Spurgeon who wrote of verse 6, "When goodness has unceasingly been received, praise should unceasingly be offered." And David finds himself as an old guy thankful for all that God has done.

He says in verse 7, "I have become as a wonder to many, but You are my strong refuge." The troubles hadn't gone away. The enemies were still there. David though wanted to focus upon the Lord. He mentions the problems in verse 4 and all, but then he goes right back to just the Lord being his strength. David speaks about being a

wonder or a miracle or a witness, if you will. And it's not really clear how he applies that, whether he means that it's a wonder that he continues to walk with God in joy, or it's a wonder that a guy his age should still be having these kind of difficulties. Really not sure. Doesn't, I guess, really matter. But whatever he means, he intends to give God the credit He alone deserves, and he continues to praise Him and to worship Him. In fact, he says in verse 8, "Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your glory all the day. And don't cast me off in my old age; do not forsake me when my strength is failing."

Spurgeon wrote, "The believer's life is a riddle, an enigma puzzling the unspiritual. He's a monster warring with those delights of his flesh which are the all in all for other men. He is a prodigy unaccountable to the judgments of ungodly men. He is a wonder to be stared at, gazed at, and feared. And by the by, he'll be contemptuously derided for his trust in God." The world stands in awe of a man and a woman of faith. Sometimes you anger them. But David realizes that. He said, "I realize I'm a wonder to many, but it is because You're a strong God in my life."

Verse 9, "Don't cast me off in my old age." There's something about getting older that makes people feel useless, or not very much in need anymore, like they've come and gone. They're now not a blessing, they're a burden. The Psalmist here pleads with God that he might still do wondrous things in a life that he has lived. I've been a wonder to many. I don't want that to stop now. Maybe I could be like Caleb, who in his 80s had a hill taking ministry. David wouldn't live that long.

"Do not forsake me when my strength fails." More than ever he sensed in his life the need for God's strength. Age reduces folks oftentimes to greater dependency. One of the harder things about getting older is having to depend on other, especially in our culture where we just believe that somehow standing on your own two feet is the epitome of accomplishment. His strength was diminishing, but God's had not. It is a lesson I think you can learn at any age, but David applies it here. So God, help me. Don't forsake me in my battle with my flesh. Don't forsake me when the good fight of faith is a little harder to undertake.

Let's face it, not everybody who grows older grows wiser; nor more spiritual. You would think time would make you strong. It's not always the case. David's stumble with Bathsheba, you will read in II Samuel 11, was when he was older. Solomon was drawn away to idolatry by a bunch of heathen women in his older years. King Asa, who was a model of godliness, finds himself when he is older no longer

turning to the Lord when he had need. He turned to the doctors. In fact, there's an interesting verse in II Chronicles, I think it's Chapter 16, where it says in the 39th year of Asa's reign he had a disease in his feet that was severe, but in his disease, he did not seek the Lord. He just sought the physicians. Interesting comment. So unlike this man that early on was a godly man who really did seek the Lord in all that he did.

David writes in verse 10, "My enemies speak against me; and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together, and they say 'God has forsaken him, so pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him.' O, God, don't be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!" I think it's a prayer that Daniel might have prayed when he learned that his enemies went to the king and made him sign a decree that said for the next month no one gets to pray to anyone but to the king, knowing full well that Daniel was a man who would go to pray several times a day to the Lord. Daniel didn't stop. He ended up in the lion's den, where God showed up to help. Enemies lie in wait. David wanted them to see God was still with him. They thought because he was older, they could take advantage of him. "The Lord has forsaken him. He doesn't really have what he used to have. Now we can take him out." Notice David's prayer, "Oh, God, don't be far from me." And then he personalizes, O my God, don't leave me. "Make haste to help me," verse 12. Apparently these evil-speaking enemies who claimed God had forsaken them were pretty close to him. I can't wait on prayer right now. Make haste. I need you to do something right now. It's kind of the same thing they said of Jesus when He was being crucified there in Luke 23, and I think a couple of the other gospels as well, where they said of Jesus, you know, "Let God save Him now if He'll have Him. He saved others, let's see if He can save Himself."

To your dying day you'll have your enemies. In life, you stop suffering the day you breathe your last. David prays in verse 13, "Lord, let them be confounded and let them be consumed who are adversaries of my life; and let them be covered with reproach and dishonor who seek my hurt." He prays that his enemies would be confused and consumed and covered with reproach. He doesn't just pray they'll be defeated, he prays they'll be discredited. He was not, willing to just let by-gones be by-gones. He's fighting the good fight in prayer. Lord, you deal with them.

But far from despair, we read in verse 14, "but I will hope continually, and will praise you yet more and more." David under pressure had not lost, the sense of God's favor. He seems to relish it. And the older he gets, the longer the praises become. I think -- we've been going through Psalms for a while and someone

said, "How long you going to be in Psalms?" It sounded like they were tired of it. How long you going to be in Psalms? I said, "I don't know." But I know the last 50 Psalms I can't teach much, because they're worship songs, unless we just want to do a study on worship. We can cover all 50 of them. So not much longer.

But Psalms 71 kind of knits problems and prayers together. I love verse 14. David in his old age says, "I'm going to hope continually." I'm not going to give up now. I'm not going to cash in now. You would think that a dying hope, a fellow that is kind of checking out, and David certainly is close to that point, you would discover in his life kind of declining songs, or expectations that rather than burn brightly begin to dim or music that kind of grows faint or, a living hope that, is now intensifying though for David. He has expectation.

You got to love people that are older that just have a hope in life that is continual, and a worship before the Lord. Not all older lives are filled with great joy. There's lots of suffering that comes with getting older. But David determined to hit the exit in faith. I'm just going to hope continually. My hope is going to be in Lord. And he's just going to continue to sing. In fact, he says in verse 15, "My mouth will tell of your righteousness and of your salvation all the day, because I don't know their limits." What a -- it's a great verse. I'm going to tell everyone about you every day, every opportunity, because I really have never seen the limits of what you can do, what your salvation can bring. I know you can do everything. I know that you're able. But I'm believing that even in my later years, there's stuff I just haven't learned and things I haven't seen, and rather than him seeing the end of things, David just -- he said, I'm just going to keep speaking about who you are and what you can do, because I don't know how much you'll want to do.

"So I'm going to go," verse 16, "in the strength of the Lord God; and I'm going to make mention of your righteousness and only of yours." The secret of His strength, knowing God's goodness, focusing only upon Him. I like that. And sometimes when you're older, you are robbed of your natural ability to fight and so you're kind of reduced to faith. And David, finds himself there. I'm only going to talk about You. You're my narrow focus. It is Your goodness and your righteousness that's going to occupy my thoughts.

He says in verse 17, "O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I've declared Your wondrous works." I heard two men talking a couple of weeks ago, giving their testimony, and one fellow talked a lot about the sin from which God delivered him after years of running. And the next guy that got up at this men's breakfast

said to somebody else, "Well, I have no testimony like that at all. I was raised in a Christian home. I remember accepting the Lord when I was five, and I haven't walked away." And I thought, one guy declares how God saves and the other one God keeps. One brings you in, but this man says, God has kept me all of these years. And David recognizes that here as well. "You've been my strength. You're the One that I can look to. Since I was a young kid, You've always been there for me." David had a past testimony that applied to his present condition.

I think there is great benefit when you grow up in the church, when you grow up with the Bible. You that are Christian parents, teach your kids well, teach them early, teach them often. Great advantage in coming to the Lord early on and having the testimony I've been with the Lord all of my life.

You, God, have been with me since my youth. Verse 18, "But now I'm old and I'm grayheaded," which upsets me, because at least he had hair, "O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, and Your power to everyone who is to come." David realized that what he had learned for so long needs to be passed along to the next generation. So important that they hear from You what God can do. The failure in the children of Israel early on, especially after the days of Joshua, was that parents weren't taking and telling their kids what God had done, because their parents hadn't walked with God. So there was -- there was a generation who knew the Lord and His power; the next generation just knew the Lord, had no experience with His power; the third generation had neither. It's dangerous. We need very much to be able to take what we've learned and pass it on to the generation with us.

We do a lot with the young people in our church. We let them lead worship. You don't always like the music. I like it, but then I grew up in the '60s, so I like any kind of song that's loud. But to see them be used by the Lord and to go out and serve. And some of these young folks in our church are the most active folks in the church. It's so good to see what God is doing with them. And whatever their youthfulness brings along with them -- weird haircuts, weird ideas. I remember going to church with -- in fact, I was a pastor when a lady in the front row said, "You got to cut off your ponytail." And she nagged me so much, I finally brought a pair of scissors and let her do it. The young people need to learn to be careful and to be -- to bridge gaps, but we -- we got to make room for them, don't we? Because God is doing a great work with them. And I love David's prayer. He didn't feel like his ministry was over until the next generation knew the God that had raised him up.

G. Campbell Morgan, writing on verse 18, wrote, "There is nothing more calculated to keep the heart of the aged young than to stand by the young, sympathizing with their ambitions, heartening their endeavors, stiffening their courage by recounting to them the strength of God's stories that have taken place in your life." David saw that. I mean, he's an old guy. I just want to make sure that the kids know You like I know You. And he found himself encouraged by that. In fact, he says in verse 19, "Also Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things. O God, who is like You?" It might have sounded like too much to ask for, but David realized that the God that he served was great. God, you can use me. Even now, when I'm weaker and slower and don't remember as much, I remember You. It is the same song that you will find Moses with his sister singing at the Red Sea crossing when he handed -- he'll sing it again when he hands the people off to Joshua at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. It's the same song that Hannah will sing when she dropped off her long-awaited son Samuel at the high priest to serve and to learn to serve the Lord. Who is like you? Good to know God has no equal. And David's request was, I just want to have an impact. I want to matter. I want -- I want to focus my attention on things that matter. David got involved with lots of things over his life, but in his older life, his focus was pass it along. Pass the things of God along.

He writes in verse 20, "You, who have shown me such great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me again from the depths of the earth." You also increase my greatness. "You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side." God had brought David through some severe troubles. Boy, he could write a book or two. Oh, he did. And though he was older, he still expected God to do great things. Influence, impact, comfort.

So he ends with saying this: "Also with the lute I'm going to praise You - and Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I'm going to sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel. My lips are going to greatly rejoice when I sing to You, my soul, which You have redeemed. My tongue will speak of Your righteousness all day long; for they are confounded, and they shall be brought to shame who would seek my hurt." He ends with strike up the band. There are enemies here, but the work is important. The way to live and to wind down is to serve the Lord. If you're here and you're retired, you'll never retire from serving the Lord. You have a lot to share.

There's a gentleman in the church here -- or he was. He passed away -- who when my parents died early came with his wife and said, "We'd like to adopt you. Everyone needs parents." And I went,

"Yeah, I had parents." "No, we're going to adopt you." And they took my wife and I in and have treated us as kids for the last 25 years. She calls me every week. I treat her just like my mom; I say, "Hi. Love you. Here's Debbie." Pretty much the same thing. Her husband passed away a few years ago. He was an old guy. And he said to me quite often, "Why am I still here? I'm ready to go." We would go to breakfast and he would embarrass me. He would -- lady would say, "Can I get you something to drink?" He says, "As soon as you tell me if you know Jesus as your personal savior." He was just an outspoken guy. And I said, "I don't know why you're still here, but I suspect that no one prays for me like you do, and until you find a replacement, you can't leave." I guess he found one.

Look, don't let time rob you from what God has for you. All the areas of time, all of them are exciting, aren't they? Every one of them. When you're young, you got ambition and drive, but when you're older, you got a lot to do. And at least from David's perspective, God has great things in mind for you when you've seen it all and been through it all and think you know it all. There's still lots to learn and lots to accomplish.