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Psalms 143:8 "Guidance By His Lovingkindness"
October 28, 2018

Let's open our Bibles to Psalm 143.

We started our series of studies in Psalms on the first week in January, so it's been a while. And the Psalms, if nothing else, are a collection of prayers that you get to listen in on, either for worship or for need, for complaint, for joy, or for sorrow. And so we thought it was a good Psalm to choose this one to end our series of Psalms studies in.

It is a prayer of David, prayed from a position of tremendous suffering, or not really explained -- it is not really explained to us where that suffering came from specifically. It is a general kind of prayer with unspecified causes, but it caused David to feel overwhelmed. He cries out for Lord to intercede. In that way, it is much like the Psalms, many of the Psalms, that come the same way. It's this urgent cry to the Lord. But there's quite a few things I think that you can learn from here, even in these short 12 verses, regarding prayer when you are overwhelmed, and that's our intention to look at this morning.

David begins in verse 1 by saying, "Hear my prayer, Lord, and give ear to my supplications! In your faithfulness answer me, and by Your righteousness. Don't enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no living person or no one living is justified." David begins with a cry for the Lord to listen, but he sets the groundwork right away. And the groundwork for him is very clear. If God is going to answer me at all, it is because He's faithful, I'm not. Notice that he says in verse 1, "In your faithfulness answer me." By Your righteousness, answer me. Verse 2, don't look at my life, because if it's a matter of You judging me, no one gets an answer.

If we come to the Lord based upon our faithfulness or figuring out that we must earn a response or merit one, then no one will ever see God's hand. So you can put

that in your list of things to do when I pray, address first and foremost this truth: You don't deserve Him. But everything God gives you is by His mercy and by His grace. We live by the grace of God. The temptation to sit and wonder why God hasn't answered your prayer -- well, maybe if I prayed a little harder, prayed a little bit more, or maybe I got to change this a little bit, like somehow I can make myself or put myself in a position where God is almost forced to act, is a foolish understanding of God. And David starts with that too. He's known the Lord long enough to know that he doesn't get because he deserves to get; he gets because God is good. And so from that important kind of perspective, David can then lay out for the record what he needs, but he's under no illusions that somehow he's earned this right. And neither should you and I be as well. He comes and he's driven here by circumstance, but he's confident based upon only the goodness of God to care for him, not upon his own goodness.

With that, David then begins to explain to the Lord, especially in verses 3 and 4, what he has been going through. He tells the Lord, Who knows everything, as he sees it, laying his cares before the Lord. Verse 3, "For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he's crushed my life to the ground; he's made me to dwell in darkness, like those who have long been dead. Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is distressed." The enemy has been persecuting my soul. We don't know who this enemy was. Like I said, no specifics. Could have been Saul, could have been Absalom, could have been a host of other people. Could have been the Philistines. But behind the scenes it is always this way, isn't it? You have one enemy: Satan. He and his hoards will work overtime to oppose and harass and destroy, if possible, your life. That's where our battle is. It's not your wife or your husband, your boss, your neighbor, or that person sitting next to you in the pew. David had been the target of the enemy's harassment, and it was getting to him. This was harder than he remembered.

In poetic descriptions, because these are poetry books, you gather fairly quickly this is very severe. David uses these words: I've been persecuted and crushed, I'm living in darkness, I feel like a guy in the grave, I can't respond, I'm stuck. This warfare required help. Spiritual warfare always does. The enemy is far stronger than we are, more powerful. We can't overcome him on our

own. We're told put on the whole armor of God, that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, and David got that. He starts off by saying, "Lord, I know I don't deserve Your help," but then says, "but I am in a dire strait here." And he's brought to prayer by the circumstances of the battle. And if you will, he's almost forced to turn to the Lord, Who is a refuge higher than he.

Unfortunately for most of us, we wait to pray until it is a last resort. Prayer for us is not the first step, it is often the final step. As a result, by the time we go pray, we're panicking. There's desperation in our voices. We can't seem to get through it or get over it, because we've waited so long to let God handle it. We've tried to handle it on our own. If you can learn to pray early on and hand things off to the Lord more quickly, desperation won't be your common experience. The victory will be sweeter.

But notice that David's struggle has been lengthy. This has been a serious issue, whatever the cause was. Under attack, broken, stomped to the ground, no light at the end of the tunnel, feeling like a corpse who has long been dead, lifeless and unable to move. Things weren't getting better, they were getting worse. He'd been seeking God, but he didn't feel like he could wait any longer on God to work. This is it. I'm at the end of my rope. And so he uses in verse 4 the words "overwhelmed" and "distressed." I've come to the end of my strength. I've exhausted all of my resources. The problems that I face persist. I've reached my limit. There's no relief in sight. I'm truly overwhelmed.

No matter how capable you think you are of handling your situations in life, let me assure you that God will put you in a position where you'll learn otherwise. Because that's the big lesson to learn, isn't it, for us? That God can do what we cannot do. That place where all of my resources fall short, where I have no sufficiency in and of myself, where I am brought to cry out to the Lord, help me or I die. That's not hyperbole, that's experience speaking at the end of his rope. I'm distressed. My heart within me is distressed. From a Bible standpoint, God does His greatest work in overwhelmed, distressed lives. Because usually until you get there, you've got other things to do. God can't do much when you still have tricks up your sleeve, a few

more ideas on the drawing board. And yet, when you run out of ideas, when your confidence is gone, when your abilities fail, usually that's where God begins to work. That old saying, "Man's extremities are God's opportunities" is right. That's where David finds himself this morning. Facing his limitations, knowing He alone can do the work, that it's the Lord that he has to run to. He's run out of ideas.

Prayers borne out of helplessness are usually prayers God answers quickly. It's just getting us to the helplessness part. It's the key; right? The key is identifying your helplessness and your dependency upon God before your situation makes you that way, before your circumstances force you to be desperate anyway. Be desperate in prayer always. Learn the lesson of dependency upon God. So, Lord, answer my prayer. I'm depending upon Your faithfulness and not my own, but here's my situation: Crushed, persecuted, in the dark, dead in the grave, overwhelmed, and distressed.

Verse 5, "I remember the days of old, meditating on Your works, musing in the works of Your hands. I spread my hand out to You; my soul longs for You like a thirsty land." David in all of his difficulty remembered how things used to be. With fondness he recalls when God was working, when deliverance did come. Now he wants that back. He sticks his hands up in the air, cries out to God, can we get to that place again? So he meditates and he muses, two very similar words in Hebrew. He looks at the past. And by looking at what God has done, there's a spark in him to want that again. The thirst returns. Like I said, this isn't a cry of a new believer. David's been around for a while. He knows how God can work. And he remembers how it was when the Lord came through and victory was his; when the lion had attacked the flock and David was able to stave off the lion; and the Lord was with him when the bear came and he grabbed him by the beard, and slew the bear, and then said "The Lord was with me," bragged about it to Saul; when God had killed Goliath with a single stone from David's slingshot; when David was able to jump out of the way of the javelin that Saul tended to throw at him on regular intervals during worship; when the Philistines came with more people than David could count. He had won lots of battles, even when he was gravely outnumbered. Those were the days of joy and confidence and hope. But that was then and this is now.

I was talking to someone the other day -- in fact, I met a fellow at a funeral this week that I graduated with in high school. Hadn't seen him since 1971. He started by saying, "Do you recognize me?" I went, "No, I don't. Who are you?" But we talked about the early days of the Jesus movement. I remember showing "A Thief in the Night" -- how many of you have seen "A Thief in the Night"? Oh, my gosh, you're old. One of the worst movies ever made. However, more greatly used by the Lord than any movie I've ever seen. And I showed movies on Friday nights as a young pastor to 1,500 people and saw 700 people get saved. And not just once a year; on a weekly basis. I mean, there was revival. And I said to him, "I long for those days." Because it isn't like that now. You literally have to pull teeth to get people to go to church, to show up on time, to read their Bibles. It's like an entirely different world. But I can't believe that this is the -- that the best of God's work is behind me. It always has to be ahead of us, doesn't it?

David longed for the days of old. I long for the days of old in that regard. I don't want to go back there, mind you, but I'd love to see it happen again. Sometimes I think that the older I get, the easier trusting the Lord would be for spiritual victory. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you are young and operating under that miss -- well, it's wrong anyway -- misconception. The battles are different. I don't worry anymore about am I truly saved. That was my battle the first six months I was a Christian. I got saved every week. But the battle to trust the Lord is always a battle. There're some advantages to being around a while. You have a wealth of experience and a legacy of God's faithfulness. You learn that the quicker you give things to the Lord, the better off you'll be. David had been around a while. He meditates. He muses. He remembers all that God has done. But God's not doing anything this time, and so he thirsts for the Lord to do it, much like a desert without water. And then that word "selah," a musical rest note in Hebrew. It literally would say to you stop and think about what he just said before you read on. God, I'm going through it. I realize it's not my goodness that allows You to answer me, but Your goodness. I remember how it used to be. I long for that again.

Verse 7, "So answer me speedily, Lord; my spirit is failing. Don't hide Your face from me, lest I become like those who go down to the pit." Answer me speedily. By the way, this is my preferred method of praying. It isn't yours? I start with, "Lord, if you could just do this today, it would be great." Or sometimes, "If Lord, by noon would be good." I've had very few prayers that I thought about in my life that I began otherwise. I don't like waiting upon God, though I often make Him wait on me. Lord, if you hide Your face from me now, my spirit is going to fail and I'm going to die. I'm going to be like those that go to the pit. You don't come through now, it's too late.

Paul said lots in his epistles about waiting upon the Lord and the price of waiting. When he wrote to the Hebrew Christians, who were so sure the Lord was coming back and He hadn't, and now they were in the crosshairs of the government, who the Romans had turned against them, had thrown them out of living in Rome in fact. There was lots of suffering. Paul wrote in chapter 10 of Hebrews, "Don't cast away your confidence. There's great reward with that. You need endurance. And if you've gone through and you've suffered and you've done the will of God, you're going to receive the promise." Hang in there, man. I hate that counsel. I want you to show your diligence with full assurance to the end. "Don't become sluggish," I think it says in Hebrews 6. "Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Urgent in crying out. But yet God sometimes has us waiting, wants us to wait.

He wrote to them about Abraham's patience, to someone who was promised something that he had to wait for. But the lesson of Abraham's waiting was in how he waited. God was pleased in how he waited most of the time. It wasn't the getting, it was the waiting, and God was pleased. Abraham was 75 years old when the Lord said to him, "You're going to have a son, and he's going to be the one through whom all of the nations of the earth are going to be blessed, and he's going to be the one through whom the Messiah will come." And Abraham couldn't have been more excited. And for the next 11 years he was so excited, and then he thought, well, it's 11 years. I'm 86. I think God needed my help. He went and found his wife's handmaiden, Hagar. He had a son with her and named him Ishmael, and then presented Ishmael to the Lord. "There you go, Lord. Thanks for the boy." And the Lord said,

"Yeah, that's not my choice. I told you I would do this." And God refused Abraham's help. 14 years later Abraham is 100, and the Lord said, "Can you help me now? No. All right. Good. At the end of yourself, maybe now I can work." And Abraham has a child at 100 years old, and names him Laughter. Who wouldn't? He and his wife both giggled. Look what we just did! We're 100!

We are told the story of Jacob, who hustled his brother out of a birthright. When his brother found out he'd been hustled, he threatened to kill him if he ever saw him again, and Jacob run off in the night to Uncle Laban's house far, far away, where for the next 20 years he lived up to his name, Heel Catcher. He swindled his uncle out of everything. He cheated him, he ripped him off, he took the inheritance, and by the time he was done, his uncle was broke and Jacob was wealthy. But he saw the handwriting on the wall, that his uncle was about fit to be tied. He would probably come with his family and take it all back, and so Jacob decided he'd sneak off in the night. Laban got his family together and chased him down, caught him at some point. They had an argument. Laban put a line in the sand and said, "May God watch between you and me, and don't you ever cross this line again if you know what's good for you." And Jacob walked away thinking, I've won, only to hear the next morning that his brother, who he hadn't seen in 20 years, who last said to him I will kill you, was coming to greet him with 400 soldiers. And Jacob went, oh, no. His scheming mind went to work. He split his family into two, sent them this different directions, lest one would get caught, the other would escape. He started to send Esau every day gifts -- cattle, sheep, grains -- hoping to somehow sway Esau's heart of vengeance.

The night before he knew that he would be meeting him, Jacob stepped across the little Jabbok River to be alone, to get maybe a good night's sleep away from the noise, but he couldn't sleep. And the angel of the Lord came, and Jacob wrestled with him all night. Tough guy. Wouldn't give up, living up to his name. In the morning, the angel said, "Let me go. The dawn comes." And Jacob said, "I'm not going to let you go unless you bless me." So the angel touched his thigh, and he permanently crippled him for life. The last bit of escape that Jacob might have undertaken, running away, would no longer be suitable. He wouldn't be able to run at all. And the angel said to Jacob, "What's your name?" He said, "I'm

the heel catcher. It's what I do." It's almost like forced surrender really. And he said, "Well, from now on I'm going to call your name Israel." It means to be governed or to be ruled by God.

And Jacob found himself at the end of his rope. The man who had run his own life couldn't do it anymore. He expected to be killed by his brother. He couldn't run away. He went back to his family that morning limping and, "Jacob, what's wrong with you?" "Don't call me Jacob. My name is Israel." I can't do it on my own. I'm out of resources. I've lost the will to fight. I want God to move. That day Esau found his brother, hugged him, kissed him on the neck, greeted him, loved him.

When your spirit is failing and you've run out of ideas, you're about as close to seeing God's hand moving as you've ever been. But you'll have to get there to see what God wants to do. You got to be in that difficult spot of surrender. Lord, hurry up. That's what he says in verse 7, hurry up. My spirit is failing. Don't hide Your face for me to die. Don't hide Your face. The face of the Lord in the poetic sense always speaks about the attention or the approving or the blessings of God, His favor. Hear his concern. God, don't turn your back on me now or I'm finished.

The fact that God doesn't turn His back on you angered the devil when it came to his dealing with Job. The Lord bragged about Job's faithfulness. Satan responded, "Well, of course he loves You. You give him everything he wants." So to which the Lord said, "Well, then take everything away. Just don't take his life." He lost his possessions, he remained faithful. He lost his health, he stuck fast. He was loving God for who God was, not for what God had given him. Satan said, "You're not playing fair." And I'm thinking, it's all right with me if I get blessed. Shelter me, Lord.

We read in verse 8, "Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, I trust in You. Cause me to know the way that I should walk, I lift my soul up to You." Cause me twice. Urgent prayer. Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning. See, he's -- answer me quickly. How about in the morning? Clear this up by morning.

I love David's cry. "Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness." What happens so often when we get in difficulties, we forget or we can no longer hear God's love for us. It's lost in the mayhem. We lose sight of who He is. And I'll tell you what: Little can stumble you if you're sure of God's love for you. So David cries out, let me hear it again. I trust you. I want to know that You love me, and I want to know the way that I should go. I'm lifting up my soul to You. I'm looking to You. God, help me. He'd been so down and out that he wasn't even hearing the goodness of God any longer. He was -- it was all like a fog to him. And yet the Bible's full of, if the Lord is with you, why fear what man can do to you? He sets His love upon me. That's where I'll deliver him. Don't fear, I'm with you. The Bible's full of God's promises. It's just hearing them in the midst of the difficulty that can be a challenge. Cause me to know the way that I should walk.

It's interesting that you won't say that until you've run out of ideas. I know that loudly we'll say, "I trust You, Lord." In my mind I'll think, yeah, but I've got some ideas. It's kind of like if you could verbalize what you think, you'd see how awful it was. You'd read it in the Bible what God wants and you would say, yeah, that's usually good, but I got a better idea. And so I don't do it. And I can't say that out loud, because the minute I say that out loud, that sounds horrible. But that's the way I respond. Help me to know the way that I should be going. Show me the way that I should go. I lift my soul up to You. "Deliver me, Lord," verse 9, "from my enemies. I'm taking shelter in You." And then, "Teach me to do Your will. You're my God. Your spirit is good. And lead me in the land of uprightness." Now, you would think as a Christian, the only sensible thing for you and I to do would be to find out what God wants and then go do it. It's pretty simple. It's not complicated. In any stretch of the imagination it should be the only and obvious choice, but like I said, intellectually. . .

I sometimes try to persuade God on my ideas. I'll go to pray now for help, but with suggestions. "Here, Lord, I've written up a few things You might want to consider. I especially like No. 4, 5 and 6. You might take a look at those. I've highlighted them, underlined them, put them in caps. Amen. Teach me to do Your will."

I once read faith defined this way: It said, "Faith is resting in the fact that God has an objective in leaving me on the scene while I feel useless to Him and a burden to others." I like that. I'm going to have to steal that somehow. David is here on the scene under pressure, longing to be taught what God wanted him to do. I love it.

So verse 11, "Revive me, Lord, for Your name's sake. For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. In my mercy cut off my enemies. Destroy those who would afflict my soul; I'm your servant." I'm your servant. I am at my best when I'm following You. "For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble."

Look at the words David uses in 12 verses. He says in verse 1 answer me, and in verse 8 cause me, and in verse 9 deliver me, and in verse 10 teach me, and in verse 10 lead me, and then revive me here in verse 11. No longer seeking to bend the will of God to David's ways, he rather wants to be bent to the will of God. That's always the best purpose in prayer anyway. It isn't the answer to prayer that ultimately is the accomplishment, it's what you become through it all.

Just think of what would happen if everyone got what they wanted in prayer. That would become a conflict, wouldn't it? Like that old story of the three guys on a deserted island with a magic lamp, and they rub it and the genie said, "Everybody gets a wish." The first guy says, "I want to go home to London," and he was gone. The second fellow said, "I want to go home to Rome," and he was gone. The third fellow looked around and said, "I'm lonely. I want my friends back."

Prayer's supposed to change us, not Him. So look, if you're out of options this morning and Jesus is your only choice, you're in a good place. You're about to see God do something great. But if you still got some ideas and you're here going, "Here, Lord, I'll give this to You, unless You don't want it. I'll handle it." Probably going to have to wait a while, because breaking us down to size can take the longest work of all. David finds himself here this morning crushed and persecuted and in darkness, and feeling like he's overwhelmed and distressed. Great place to be. Don't fight it. Find Him in it.