

Psalm 31

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[0 : 00] To the Choir Master, a Psalm of David. In you, O Lord, do I take refuge. Let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness, deliver me.

Incline your ear to me. Rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. For you are my rock and my fortress. And for your name's sake, you lead me and guide me.

You take me out of the net they have hidden for me. For you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols. But I trust in the Lord. I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love. Because you have seen my affliction.

You have known the distress of my soul. You have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy. You have set my feet in a broad place. Be gracious to me, O Lord.

[1 : 03] For I am in distress. My eye is wasted from grief. My soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing. My strength fails because of my iniquity.

And my bones waste away. Because of all my adversaries, I have become a reproach. Especially to my neighbours. And an object of dread to my acquaintances.

Those who see me in the street flee from me. I have been forgotten. Like one who is dead. I have become like a broken vessel. For I hear the whispering of many.

Terror on every side. As they scheme together against me. As they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O Lord. I say, you are my God.

My times are in your hand. Rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors. Make your face shine on your servant. Save me in your steadfast love. O Lord, let me not be put to shame.

[2 : 02] For I call upon you. Let the wicked be put to shame. Let them go silently to Sheol. Let the lying lips be mute. Which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt.

O how abundant is your goodness. Would you have stored up for those who fear you. And worked for those who take refuge in you. In the sight of the children of mankind.

In the cover of your presence you hide them. From the plots of men. You store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the Lord. For he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me.

When I was in a besieged city. I had said in my alarm. I'm cut off from your sight. But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. And I cried to you for help.

Love the Lord, all you his saints. The Lord preserves the faithful. But abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. Be strong. And let your heart take courage.

[3 : 06] All you who wait for the Lord. Friends, I wonder if you find the Psalms difficult to understand and relate to.

I first was working through these Psalms with Uni Church. Over the summer. Last summer. You know, our first summer for Psalms series.

And each week before I came to preach them. I was chatting through them with Peter Nixon. Many of you will remember our brother Peter. And I was chatting to him about this particular Psalm.

As I was preparing to preach it the first time for Uni Church. And he said to me that as a younger man. He found the Psalms very difficult to read. And to relate to.

Because they seem to be talking about experiences. That were just very far from anything he had yet experienced. But increasingly as he got older.

[4 : 0 6] He found them more and more meaningful. And of course since he was nearing his death. And Psalm 31 is basically a Psalm about facing death. We were both struck by just how many of the lines in this Psalm.

He could kind of take on for himself. And actually use in his own prayer life. As he tried to walk faithfully with God in his last days.

Now we are a relatively mixed congregation I guess. Right? Young and old. Perhaps some of us are feeling young and invincible here. Perhaps others are feeling older and fragile.

And undoubtedly we've all had different experiences with death. Perhaps close calls. Loved ones dying. And I guess even now that for some of us.

I don't know what's happening with everyone here. But I imagine that for some people death feels kind of miles away. And some of the things in this Psalm are very hard to relate to.

[5 : 0 8] And the challenge for us this morning will be to see the relevance of this subject. That in fact death faces us all. We all need someone to help us deal with death.

Whereas for others I guess it might feel uncomfortably close. Some of the things in this Psalm. And I guess the challenge this morning will just be to hold it together. But of course death is something that we can and should cry about.

And we grieve with those who grieve. It's always unnatural. It wasn't meant to be. However normal it has become. So it comes to us all.

You remember when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Bible says on that very day they died. They were cut off from God.

Which is to say that we're all experiencing death right now. In these mortal bodies we are dead. And dying.

[6 : 1 1] And we will die. Again some of you might remember one of my daughters. I won't name any names. But when she was 18 months old. She fell off some play equipment.

And she broke her leg. Her mother was supposed to be looking after her. It's just a joke. We're fine with it. Anyway. So we took this child to the emergency department.

We got the x-ray done. She had a cast put on etc. Which she thought was very cool. And the doctors told us that it would take her six days to heal.

He said the same fracture would take me six weeks to heal. And would take an 80 year old six months. But it would take her six days.

Which to me is just a reminder that from the moment we're born. We're dying. You see. And people don't die from old age of course. But from the accumulation of diseases and injuries.

[7 : 1 2] Old age is not a disease. But there are diseases that accumulate over time. Injuries. You know. Damage. Whatever else it might be. Over the course of our lives.

Death is manifesting itself. We're all confronted by death every day. We're just so used to it that we hardly notice most days. But to use an image from the Psalms.

It's as if the grave has a gaping mouth. And I would add to that. That it's already chewing on us. We can't escape it.

Except that in this Psalm. David has not given up hope. In the face of death. He trusts a God. Who can reverse the rot. A God who can provide safety and protection.

A God who is loving and merciful. And cares about his people in their distress. Now it's a fairly long Psalm. So we're going to take it in five chunks.

[8 : 14] And we're not going to be able to talk about everything. But if you've got an outline in front of you. You'll see. I just want to try and summarize each section as we go. And draw your attention to one or two key lines in each section.

So that outline might help you. If you want to follow along. So in verses 1 to 8. In the midst of death. David offers up a cry for salvation.

And the key line in this first section is there in verse 5. Into your hand I commit my spirit. Now this is actually the most important line in the whole Psalm.

And some of you I'm sure will already know why. Because this is the line in this Psalm that Jesus chooses to quote on the cross. Which if you think about it is quite astonishing isn't it?

I don't know if Psalm 31 would be one of your kind of top tier favorite Psalms. I was just talking about this with Shem earlier. You know I'd be picking Psalm 23. Maybe Psalm 119.

[9 : 14] You know Psalm 110. And Jesus chooses to make his last words on the cross. A quote from Psalm 31. So listen to Luke chapter 23.

It was now about the sixth hour. And there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. While the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus calling out with a loud voice said.

Father. Into your hands I commit my spirit. And having said this he breathed his last. Now you might have heard us say quite often preaching the Psalms.

That it's worth imagining the Psalms on the lips of Jesus. Especially when we read David's Psalms I think. It's important for us to remember that King David. Was not just an ordinary member of the Israelite community.

He was the king of Israel. And his experiences therefore. Were written down. First and foremost to point us. To the ultimate king of Israel. The Lord Jesus.

[10 : 19] But here of course. We don't have to imagine. The words of Psalm 31 on the lips of Jesus. Because he actually. Decided to quote them. At the moment of his death.

He's wanting to show us. What was happening to him. So he took on the words of Psalm 31. Verse 5. Into your hand I commit my spirit. The point is that Jesus claiming to be the new and greater son of David.

The ultimate Messiah. The Christ. Who. Just like his forefather. Had to face death. And in the face of death. Entrusted himself to God.

Entrusted himself to his father. And just as David's prayers were answered. Jesus' prayers were answered. You see the second line in verse 5. You have redeemed me O Lord. Faithful God.

So when Jesus committed his spirit to his father. Of course his father didn't reject him. In fact remember just a few verses earlier. Jesus had said to the repentant thief on the cross.

[11 : 20] Truly I say to you. Today you will be with me in paradise. In other words. Jesus was very confident. That as soon as he died. He would immediately go to be with his father.

Father. He would immediately go to heaven. To paradise. He knew that his spirit would not descend into the depths of Sheol. When he died.

And be swallowed up by the grave. He would go to be with God. And with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. With the thief beside him. And with all of God's people. And so brothers and sisters.

We should be clear too. That exactly the same thing will happen for us. When we die. When we die. Our spirits or our souls. Immediately go to be with our father.

And with our Lord Jesus in paradise. Our bodies. Will go into the grave. For a time. To be resurrected when Jesus returns.

[12 : 20] But our souls or our spirits. Will immediately go to be in God's presence. When you finally have to face death. Remember that. That as soon as you die.

You will step into the presence of the Lord Jesus. Let's move on to section 2. Verses 9 to 13. David fleshes out a bit more of his painful situation.

And the line I think we should focus on here. Is in verse 10. Notice how David says. My strength fails. Because of my iniquity. Now iniquity means guilt or sin.

And David is worried about his sin as he dies. Because the reason death hurts is sin. Paul calls sin the sting of death. That's because the thing that drags us into Sheol when we die.

And keeps us out of paradise. Is sin. So David as it were is quaking. And frightened. By the prospect of dying in his sins. He wants to escape death.

[13 : 17] And he wants to escape his sin. The two go hand in hand. The question is though. I think. Given that all I've been saying is. How can we imagine. These words on the lips of Jesus.

Since Jesus was sinless. But of course. That's precisely what Jesus has done for us. When he came to earth. He took on our sins. Indeed Paul says.

He became sin for us. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21. The point is that as we read through the Psalms. And we're reading through David's experiences. And we're talking about putting these words on the lips of Jesus.

Of course we can only do that. Because Jesus chose to step into our world. And step into our sins. And step into our experiences. He has as it were taken on.

These words for us. Not that they belong to him in the first place. And he was living in glory. In his celestial existence.

[14 : 19] In his natural state if you like. He didn't live in agony. Or in pain. Or in sin. But he took on the words of this Psalm. Not by accident. Or by some fault of his own.

But deliberately. In order to take the punishment for us. For our sakes. He chose to step down. From his lofty throne in heaven.

To live among us. In our world. And although he lived a sinless life. He didn't just come here to set an example for us to follow. No more than that. He became sin.

He soaked himself in our sins as it were. And he did fear death. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane. He feared.

His father's wrath. He feared being dragged down into the grave. And he cried out for help. So again friends. That is what this Psalm is about.

[15 : 17] It's about pointing us to the wonder of our King Jesus. Who faced death for us. And in the midst of all his grief and fear. He continued to entrust himself to God.

Now in the next part of the Psalm. Verse 14 to 18. I've called this section a clear distinction. David wants the Lord to treat him differently to the wicked. See in verse 14. In the Hebrew. The word I is emphatic.

Literally David says. I. I trust in the Lord. In you O Lord. I say you are my God. And throughout this section you see. David describes himself as God's servant.

He's one of the righteous ones in verse 18. While on the other hand. He's facing off against ferocious enemies. Persecutors. The wicked. Who talk insolently and proudly. So David wants God to save him.

But to punish the wicked. I think it's best encapsulated in verse 17. Where he says. O Lord. Let me not be put to shame. For I call upon you.

[16:18] Let the wicked be put to shame. Let them go silently to Sheol. So you see how David deliberately contrasts himself with the wicked. No shame for me.

But let the wicked be put to shame. And the difference between the two is absolutely crucial. Notice in the middle there. David gives God his reason why he wants to be treated differently.

For I call upon you. He says. In other words. The difference. Between the righteous and the wicked. The difference is faith.

Isn't it? Now this is really important. And of course we'll get fleshed out further in. Well actually in Psalm 32. Famously. But then in the New Testament.

Because crucially. It's not good works. David is not asking to be treated differently. On the basis of his righteous deeds. No.

[17:16] He's just talked about his iniquity. In the previous section. He's not oblivious to his own sinfulness. He's just admitted that. But he sees the fundamental difference.

Between the righteous and the wicked. Is faith. David wants to be saved. Because he's calling out to God. For help. Because as he says in verse 14.

I. I trust in you. O Lord. I say you are my God. And they. They don't trust in you. O Lord. They worship other gods. Now friends.

This is the simple truth. At the heart of the Christian faith. That we are saved. By faith. Except that it begs the question. Doesn't it? Why? Why does God save people.

On the. Simple basis of faith. I wonder if that seems. A bit arbitrary to you. People often. Say that to me. That faith seems a bit arbitrary. Why does God send good people to hell?

[18:15] Because. They don't have faith. And he welcomed bad people into heaven. Just because. They believe in him. I think the first thing to notice here.

Is that the opposite of faith. Is pride. You see how David. Talks about that. He doesn't say the opposite of faith. Is doubt. Or. Unbelief.

Exactly. It's pride. David describes himself. As one who trusts God. And is therefore righteous. But the wicked. Verse 18. Speak insolently.

Against the righteous. In pride. And contempt. I think if you're confused. And you think. Faith is just. A bit of an arbitrary. Distinction.

I think it's really important. To get this. That the opposite of faith. Is pride. Faith is not some. Arbitrary standard. That God has. God has to determine. Who he'll help. And who he won't. No.

[19:10] Faith is actually. The foundation. To all right behavior. Towards God. Faith is the foundation. To all right behavior.

Towards God. But faith is the right way. To relate to God. It's the only way. To treat God properly. To treat him as God.

Right. As our creator. And sustainer. Faith is about. Humble reliance on God. It's about wanting his help. Calling upon him for help. Trusting his promises.

To save us. So without faith. It is impossible. To please God. Without faith. Everything we do. Is sin. Faith is.

The first right. Thing. The first righteous thing. Anyone can ever do. When faith is granted. To them. Because it's the first time. We're treating God properly. Without faith.

[20 : 07] Morality. And good works. Just flow from pride. And they make us more proud. Don't they? Pride is when you say.

I don't need God. And I don't want God. I don't want God's help. I don't need God's help. Pride is about self-sufficient. That self-confident attitude. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.

I'll do things my way. Whereas faith is true righteousness. Only good deeds. Which flow from faith. Are truly good.

God. And of course. And of course. Our faith and our good deeds. Don't save us. Either. Jesus. The one we trust in.

Is the one who saves us. But faith is our right response to him. And our good deeds. Flow from faith. Otherwise.

[21 : 03] All good deeds. That flow from sin. And pride. Don't please God. God. Those kinds of works. Are not truly good. And will never make us right with God.

Pride is what keeps us from calling out to God for help. And David rightly wants all those who continue in their stubborn rebellion against God. To suffer.

Their just punishment for their sin. He wants their insolent words to be stopped. Think of Romans chapter 3. He wants their insolent words to be stopped by the righteous judgment of God.

And of course. David is relying on God to separate the righteous from the wicked. Because God is righteous. We've already seen that earlier in this psalm actually.

In verse 1. Remember. In you O Lord. Do I take refuge. Let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness. Deliver me. So David expects to be delivered.

[22 : 07] Not just by God's grace. Or his kindness. Or something. But by God's righteousness. That this would be the right thing for God to do. Would be to deliver David. And so in this next section.

David takes a moment to celebrate God's goodness. It's a hymn of praise. On your outline. We're up to point four. A joyful celebration. So in verse 19.

Oh how abundant is your goodness. Which you have stored up for those who fear you. Or in verse 21. Blessed be the Lord. For he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me.

See David sings about God's goodness here. He wants God to be honored and glorified. And prays for his steadfast love. The word chesed there is about God's gracious and kind commitment to his people.

That's the key covenant. Key term in terms of the covenant. God established and keeps his covenant with his people. Because of his chesed. His steadfast love. The reason he's given himself to us.

[23 : 07] And he continues to work all things for our good. And he hides us in his presence. And he hears our prayers. Is ultimately because of his steadfast love for us. Notice in verse 22.

For David's part. He admits his unsteadiness. I had said in my alarm. I'm cut off from your sight. What David is admitting here. I think is that one day he panicked.

You know. Doubt crept in. He was terrified. For the Lord Jesus. Of course he was cut off from God's sight one day. But I think for David. He's confessing his unsteadiness.

Which is good to know isn't it? That our covenant with God. Doesn't depend on perfect unwavering faith. We're not saved by the strength of our faith. We're saved by the object of our faith.

God himself. And David. Even in his moment of doubt and panic. He did cry out to God. Didn't he? Which is kind of the strange paradox of faith actually.

[24 : 08] When you think about it. That faith allows us to take our doubts. And our fears to God. That the right thing to do with our doubts and fears.

Is to take them to God. And he hears us when we cast all our anxieties. And cares upon him. God is still there for us. And we have doubts.

All right. But it's time to wrap up. We've come to the last section. And David finishes this psalm with a hopeful conclusion. Verses 23 and 24.

As with many of the psalms. David turns outward at the end. To kind of talk to the rest of us here. And he says. He says to you.

Love the Lord. All you his saints. The Lord preserves the faithful. But abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. Be strong and let your heart take courage.

[25 : 06] All you who wait for the Lord. So here's David's conclusion. And he wraps up with a bunch of the different themes. That he's kind of drawn out from the previous psalm.

Love the Lord. In other words. Meet the love of God. With love for him in return. That's the right response to love. Isn't it? Is to reciprocate that love. Love the Lord.

All you his saints. So David wants us to be set apart. We mustn't be like the wicked. We must be separated out. David wants a clear distinction. From the rest of mankind.

The Lord preserves the faithful. But abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. So again. The difference between the righteous and the wicked. Between sinners and saints.

Is faith. The saints are those who trust in God. The wicked are those who act in pride. And David adds the little word abundant. To warn us of the severity of God's punishment.

[26 : 10] Against the wicked. Be strong and let your heart take courage. All you who wait for the Lord. The paradox of faith.

Is that the only true path to finding strength. Is admitting weakness. Waiting for the Lord. Is a profoundly passive activity.

Isn't it? It's an admission of weakness in many ways. We're just waiting. We're not here to change the world. To establish God's kingdom. Or whatever. To save ourselves.

No. We're waiting. For the Lord to save us. He will change the world. He will establish his kingdom. And yet on the other hand. Waiting.

Is profoundly motivating. And strengthening. Because we know. That the Lord will come. Hope is not lost. Our sin has not won. We can overcome any enemy.

[27 : 09] Because God is for us. Even death. And of course. This paradox is even more pronounced. This side of Jesus' death. And resurrection. While we live in these last days. Jesus has come.

And Jesus is with us. The victory has been won. Death has been overcome. Today is the day of salvation. And strength. And victory over sin. Now. And yet.

We are still waiting. For the Lord. Aren't we? And we still die. And we're still weak. Now. There are lots of New Testament passages. We might land on this morning.

I just thought. I might focus on. A couple in one Peter. Remember. The main point of this psalm. Is to see that the Messiah. Faced. As the Messiah faced death.

He entrusted himself. To Yahweh. And yet. At the end of this psalm. He encourages. All the saints. To do the same. Right. And he turns outwards.

[28 : 03] To talk directly to us. So it reminds me. Of the Apostle Peter's words. In his first letter. In chapter 3. He talks about Christ's sufferings. How he set an example.

For us. When he was reviled. He did not revile in return. When he suffered. He did not threaten. But continued entrusting himself. To him who judges justly. And then in chapter 4.

He says. To all of us. Therefore. Let those who suffer. According to God's will. Entrust their souls. To a faithful creator.

While doing good. Seems to me. That that sums up. The punchline of our psalm. So friends. As you face. Difficulties. And ultimately death.

Whether in the aches. And pains of each day. Or one day. When you die. However far away. That day might be. We need to remember. The death of the Lord Jesus. And follow in his footsteps.

[29 : 06] Father. Into your hands. I commit my spirit. It's a prayer of faith. And because of the Lord Jesus. Because of his death. In our place. We can be assured.

That God preserves the faithful. That he hears those. Who cry to him in distress. That we will be welcomed. Into paradise. Immediately. Upon our deaths.

And ultimately. Our bodies will be resurrected too. God is merciful. And kind. And righteous. And in his steadfast love. He will raise us up. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Loving father.

In the face of death. Help us to cry out to you. To trust you. Though we might face. Terrible pain. And decay.

[30 : 06] And all the horrors of death. We know that ultimately. You have overcome them. And that through the Lord Jesus. We will live. In your presence forever.

Please help us to be those who. Live and die well. Who suffer. Bringing glory to you. Trusting you. And not giving in to fear.

Or panic. Or to despair. We do pray for those. Around us as well father. Who are still. In death. And facing death.

In their sins. We pray father. That you might have mercy. Upon them. And help us to point. To the only one. Who can bring hope. In the face of death. Our Lord Jesus.

Prince of life. We ask these things. In his name. Amen. Amen.