

What to Do When God Sleeps

(Psalm 44)

1/23/19; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

I slept in when my dad worked on the trucks that he owned.

While he changed the oil, I pulled up the covers

While he rotated the tires, I rolled over in bed.

And I have paid a price for my laziness.

I have zero mechanical knowledge of either of my cars.

My perspective on automobiles is simple.

I will make sure that the tank has gas.

I will make sure the tires have air.

I will make sure oil is changed fairly regularly.

And as result, I expect to walk to my car in the morning, put my key in the ignition and listen to the car crank up.

Very simple.

In my view, gas + oil change + inflated tires equals a car rolling down the road.

Yet, we all know this is not reality.

In fact, there are times when gas in the car, air in the tires, oil has been changed, but a turned key doesn't result in a running car.

At that moment, 3 thoughts run through my head almost simultaneously..

#1 - How I am going to get to where I need to go?

#2 - Who will fix this?

#3 - How much are they going to rip me off?

As those 3 thoughts run through my head, panic and anxiety set in, anger rises up, and my day is off to a really bad start...

And usually, it's not even 8 am yet..

Now leads to a bigger question in terms of our faith..

What happens when you do everything right, but God doesn't keep his end of the bargain?

What happens when you are reading and praying and obeying the Lord, but you still find trouble in your life.

And not just trouble but big trouble and extended trouble..

What happens when you tell everyone that you are trusting in the Lord during a difficult time, but the Lord doesn't appear to be faithful to you.

What happens when people mock your trust as blind faith because God isn't responding to your prayers?

Well, Psalm 44 is going to give us some answers tonight..

Last week, we finished up the book of Ecclesiastes, which seems to be Solomon's farewell to the world where he calls those in the world to fear God and keep his commands..

But what happens when that doesn't appear to be working?

Let's face it.

You can have a healthy fear of God.

You can be a person whose life is marked by obedience to the Lord...

Not perfection, but generally speaking, you obey the Lord, and yet, that doesn't seem to work..

What then?

Well, Psalm 44 provides an answer...

We are going to look at this psalm in 3 parts beginning in verses 1-8 with what we will call....

I. A Proper Perspective (1-8)

As we come to the book of Psalms, let me remind you of a few truths about this book that stands at what is the essential middle of the Bible.

First and foremost, psalms are songs.

In fact, these 150 psalms in this book could be considered the 150 hymns for Israel..

And like hymns, each psalm has its own character.

Some are psalms of joy.

Some are psalms of thanksgiving.

Some are psalms of prayer..

And some are psalms of sadness.

There are still other psalms that don't necessarily have a mood to them.

They are simply instructive psalms to teach us about the character of God or the fallenness of man..

Well, psalm 44 is often seen as a psalm of sadness..

Many consider this to be a psalm of lament where the author of the psalm is overcome with grief..

And I think you see some of that here, but the overall theme of this psalm seems to be a psalm of instruction..

In fact, if you look at the title of this psalm, it is described in this way...

For the choir director. A [a]Maskil of the sons of Korah.

Now I remind you that this title is inspired by God.

It may not have a verse number beside it, but this title was in the original Hebrew text..

And the key word in this title is to see that this psalms was a Maskil.

Now, there is debate over what exactly a Maskil is, but there is strong evidence to see a Maskil as a poem or song of instruction..

And that makes sense here because what you are going to see in some confusion in the psalm..

In fact, the middle portion of the psalm is a search for understanding..

In other words, there is a need for knowledge in this psalm, and God uses the words of this psalm to teach the writer of the psalm, the nation of Israel and even us something.

Now also remember this about the book of psalms..

Each psalm is set in the context of Israel as a nation in OT from 1400 BC to 500 BC.

Some are written in a very specific context.

For instance, the title of Psalm 3 tells us that it was as David fled from his son Absalom..

Psalm 51 was written as right after Nathan confronted David about his sin with Bathsheba..

However, psalm 44 doesn't offer a specific context.

However, from the contents of the psalm, it seems that it was written after Israel was defeated in battle..

Other than that, we simply know that it was written as a Maksud to teach Israel and the reader of the psalm some truth..

We also note that this psalm was written for the choir director, which would make sense for a song..

And then we note that this psalm was for the sons of Korah.

There are other psalms that are for the sons of Korah..

In fact, most of them are found right around verse 44..

Who were the sons of Korah?

Well, we really don't know.

Most likely, they were part of leading Israel in worship...

Kinda like our choir or praise team..

So we have a psalm inspired by God to teach us some truth we need, and the sons of Korah were part of leading people to sing this hymn..

Now, let's read the first 8 verses of it..

***1 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.***

2

***You with Your own hand drove out the nations;
Then You planted them;***

*You afflicted the peoples,
Then You spread them abroad.*

3

*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.*

4

*You are my King, O God;
Command [b]victories for Jacob.*

5

*Through You we will push back our adversaries;
Through Your name we will trample down those
who rise up against us.*

6

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

7

*But You have saved us from our adversaries,
And You have put to shame those who hate us.*

8

*In God we have boasted all day long,
And we will give thanks to Your name forever.
[c]Selah.*

What we see in these opening 8 verses can simply be called a proper perspective on God.

In fact verse 5 and 6 are the heart of this opening section..

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

7

***But You have saved us from our adversaries,
And You have put to shame those who hate us.***

That my friend is a proper view of God's sovereignty..

This is a sermon on the nature of God in 2 verses.

The psalmist is speaking for himself and really for the entire nation of Israel, and they all acknowledge that God is the source of their victory..

Reminds me of David going to meet Goliath...

If you remember Goliath taunted David, calling him a dog who was coming to meet him with a stick...

Yet listen to David's response to Goliath..

45 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.

46 This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your

head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands."

This attitude is why David is called a man after God's own heart.

He understood that the Lord was the deliverer of men and nations not the strength of man..

And this psalmist understands that too..

And where did he get this proper perspective on God?

Look back at verse 1 of this psalm...

***1 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.***

The psalmist had gotten a proper view of God's care and sovereignty from his father..

This is why we are careful to teach the next generation the ways of God..

It may be the age of the internet social media, but nothing makes an impact on your children that the testimony of parents who have witnessed the work of God in the world..

And that testimony had impacted the psalmist so much that he declared his faith in God..

Verse 4.

4

***You are my King, O God;
Command [b]victories for Jacob***

So everything about verses 1-8 is good and proper and a great Sunday school lesson on God's power and authority...

And everyone is happy and things are rolling right along..

But now let's read verses 9-22..

We will call this..

II. A Confusing Collapse (9-22)

9

Yet You have rejected us and brought us to dishonor,

And do not go out with our armies.

10

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

11

*You give us as sheep [d]to be eaten
And have scattered us among the nations.*

12

*You sell Your people [e]cheaply,
And have not [f]profited by their sale.*

13

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

14

*You make us a byword among the nations,
A [g]laughingstock among the peoples.*

15

*All day long my dishonor is before me
And [h]my humiliation has overwhelmed me,*

16

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

Take note of something...

In verses 1-8, you see a lot of the word “you” describing the actions of God..

“You drove out the nations..”

“You pushed back our adversaries..”

“You saved us..”

All good works of God, and all accurate..

But now, we get to verse 9 and the “yous” continue but it they are nearly as pleasant..

“You rejected us”

“You give us as sheep”

“You make us a laughingstock”

In other words, the psalmist maintains the right perspective..

He realizes that as God blesses, God also sends trouble..

Sounds like, The Lord Gives, and the Lord Takes Away..

And to the psalmist's credit and Israel's credit, they get it.

God in on the throne when our day is going good and He hasn't moved when our day is going bad.

And both days are a result of his hand over our life..

So up this point in the psalm, we can identify with Israel..

Some days you are the windshield and some days you are the bug, but we never doubt that God is always driving the car..

But now in verses 17-22, we have a problem..

17

All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You,

And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant.

18

Our heart has not turned back,

And our steps have not deviated from Your way,

19

Yet You have crushed us in a place of jackals

And covered us with the shadow of death.

20

If we had forgotten the name of our God

Or extended our [i]hands to a strange god,

21

***Would not God find this out?
For He knows the secrets of the heart.***

22

***But for Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.***

Going back to my introduction for a minute..

The first time my car wouldn't start, I remember headed back into the house to tell my dad.

He immediately says something like..

I bet you left the lights on last night and the battery is dead..

Sometimes, he was exactly right, but on those rare occasions, I reply with confidence and say, "No I checked that. The lights weren't on."

His next response would be.

"I bet that battery is old or those cables on it are corroded."

Sometimes he was right, the connected were corroded and a little wire brush make it crank..

But on those rare occasions when the battery wasn't old and I had actually checked the connections, I could tell him...

Nope, it ain't the lights being left on..

It ain't an old battery.

It ain't a bad connection.

Then he would actually have to get up and come look at it himself..

In verses 17-22, the psalmist is telling God that their car won't but that they have checked all the possible problems, and none of them are the cause..

Look back at verse 17...

17

***All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You,
And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant.***

In other words, we just got routed in battle and taunted by our enemies but it is not because we forgot about you as we fought..

And it is not because we have violated our covenant with you..

The plea of the psalmist is that their connections to God seem to be good but they lost anyway..

Verse 18 continues their case..

Our hearts have not turned away from you..

Our steps haven't left your path..

On top of that. look at verse 22..

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

In other words, Israel wasn't fighting this battle due to selfish ambition or greed or a pride..

They had been fighting for God to defend his name in the world..

Yet, they lost and they lost big time..

And we get back to our original question at the beginning of this message.

How do we respond when we have done the right thing but God apparently does the wrong thing by abandoning us?

Well let's get to the teaching portion of this psalm..

Verse 23-26...

We will call this..

III. An Appropriate Appeal (23-26)

Verse 23..

23

*Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord?
Awake, do not reject us forever.*

24

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

25

*For our soul has sunk down into the dust;
Our body cleaves to the earth.*

26

*Rise up, be our help,
And redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkind-
ness.*

In what may seem like almost blasphemy, the psalmist cries for help..

Now, first of all, God doesn't sleep or slumber, so this isn't a literal call for God to wake up..

But it is the call of a desperate psalmist and desperate nation that has just experienced an embarrassing defeat..

Instead of coming home and crying in their corn flakes, they continue to cry out to God..

If that sounds like something you have heard before, it is...

Luke 18:1..

*1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2 saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3 There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, '[a]Give me legal protection from my opponent.' 4 For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will [b]give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will [c]wear me out.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge *said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, [d]and will He delay long over them? 8 I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly.*

To be clear, God is not bothered by the cries of his people.

He doesn't see them as irreverent and blasphemous if they come from a sincere heart..

When trouble comes and trouble stays despite you doing the right thing, don't lose heart and don't give up..

Continue to call upon the Lord.

Continue to plead your case to him.

Continue to speak into his ears..

John Andrew understands this principle perfectly..

He doesn't ask once if we can go fishing, he asks 17 times in 1 minute..

Sadly, I am a man and often respond in frustration and impatience, but God is a perfect Father who hears the cries of his people and is not bothered by them...

And make an important note in your mind concerning your prayers from verse 26..

26

***Rise up, be our help,
And redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkind-
ness.***

In other words, the psalmist is not praying for help to vindicate himself..

He is not praying for God to answer to vindicate Israel..

He is praying for God to answer so that God vindicates Himself..

God, answer our prayer for help so that your name and your faithfulness is on full display for the unbelieving world..

I can tell you this..

Your prayers would change if you would your needs second and the glory of God first..

Instead of asking God to heal you so you can feel better, ask God to heal you so that you can offer a testimony of his power.

Instead of asking God for a job so that you can have more money and provide security for your family, ask God for a job because it gives you the best chance of spreading the gospel at work..

Instead of asking God for a relationship so that you can feel loved, ask God to send someone in your life to help you love the Lord more..

Look, Israel wanted to win battles for practical reasons..

They wanted to win to avoid more casualties..

They wanted to win to gain more territory and land..

But ultimately, they wanted to win for the sake of the Lord's name in the world..

And may we be as zealous for Him in our prayers..

Conclusion

So where does this hit us?

#1 - Bad things happen to God's people.

Why did an obedient Israel lose a battle?

Only God knows.

Why did obedient believers get killed by a drunk driver?

Only God knows.

In a fallen world filled with fallen people, bad things happen to God's people.

I have been heard well meaning teachers in the church tell students...

God says if you do good things, good things will happen.

But God also says if you do bad things, bad things will happen.

And though I don't interrupt the class to correct that notion since it is generally true, I also tell that teacher afterwards that he or she isn't entirely accurate..

Sometimes, you do good things and bad things happen.

That is the story of Psalm 44...

But even greater than that, that is also the story of Christ.

Lived the goodest life imaginable but got the baddest of endings...

We need to be careful..

Just because you get bad news doesn't mean God is unhappy with you.

It may simply mean that God wants to continue trusting and knocking at his door..

#2 - Bad things happen to grow God's people.

Let me read you this familiar passage...

Mark 4:35..

35 On that day, when evening came, He *said to them, "Let us go over to the other side."

36 [j]Leaving the crowd, they *took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. 37 And there *arose a fierce

gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.

Verse 38..

38 Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they *woke Him and *said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

Sound familiar...

Concerned people telling God to wake up?

39 And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and [k]it became perfectly calm. 40 And He said to them, “Why are you [l]afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Sometimes, it appears as God is sleeping through your prayers simply because he wants you to trust Him.

These disciples had done everything right, yet they still weren't mature in their faith..

And look, you may be doing most things right, but God simply wants your faith to grow as well..

That can only come as you trust Him even when he appears to be silent...Let us pray...