

You Need to Live in the Past

(Psalm 74)

(preached 9/10/14; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

News reporters are trained to answer the 6 most important questions of any story.

Who, what, when, where, why, and how?

Normally, the what, when and where are the easiest to answer...

Sometimes the how and the who are the harder to answer....

But the why of any news story is often the most difficult to answer?

Usually, the why question takes more searching and asking to find a clear answer.

Take for instance the story of a plane crash.

The who, what, when where, and how are easy to describe,

But the why often takes investigators months if not years to determine....

If they arrive at an answer at all.

The "whys" in life are the most difficult questions to answer....

And it even becomes more difficult when the question of why lingers on or even goes unanswered.

Well, that is the problem that we are going to look at tonight in Psalm 74.

So, if you will take your Bibles and turn with me to Psalm 74....

We will begin by reading this psalm and then we will go back and look at its parts...

A [a]Maskil of Asaph.

*74 O God, why have You rejected us forever?
Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of
Your [b]pasture?*

*2 Remember Your congregation, which You have
purchased of old,
Which You have redeemed to be the tribe of Your
inheritance;*

And this Mount Zion, where You have dwelt.

*3 [c]Turn Your footsteps toward the perpetual
ruins;*

*The enemy has damaged everything within the
sanctuary.*

*4 Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your
meeting place;*

They have set up their own [d]standards for signs.

*5 It seems as if one had lifted up
His [e]axe in a [f]forest of trees.*

*6 And now [g]all its carved work
They smash with hatchet and [h]hammers.*

*7 They have [i]burned Your sanctuary [j]to the
ground;*

They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name.

*8 They said in their heart, "Let us [k]completely
[l]subdue them."*

*They have burned all the meeting places of God in
the land.*

9 We do not see our signs;

There is no longer any prophet,

Nor is there any among us who knows how long.

10 How long, O God, will the adversary revile,

And the enemy spurn Your name forever?

11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?

From within Your bosom, destroy them!

*12 Yet God is my king from of old,
Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth.*

*13 [m]You divided the sea by Your strength;
[n]You broke the heads of the sea monsters [o]in the waters.*

*14 [p]You crushed the heads of [q]Leviathan;
[r]You gave him as food for the [s]creatures of the wilderness.*

*15 [t]You broke open springs and torrents;
[u]You dried up ever-flowing streams.*

*16 Yours is the day, Yours also is the night;
[v]You have prepared the [w]light and the sun.*

17 [x]You have established all the boundaries of the earth;

[y]You have [z]made summer and winter.

18 Remember this, [aa]O Lord, that the enemy has reviled,

And a foolish people has spurned Your name.

19 Do not deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast;

Do not forget the life of Your afflicted forever.

20 Consider the covenant;

For the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.

*21 Let not the oppressed return dishonored;
Let the afflicted and needy praise Your name.*

22 Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause;

*Remember [ab]how the foolish man reproaches You
all day long.*

*23 Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries,
The uproar of those who rise against You which
ascends continually.*

Here are 23 verses that I have divided into three
sections....

In verses 1-11, we will see Why God?

In verses 12-17, we will see Yet God.

Then in verses 18-23, we will see Please God.

Now, the psalm begins in verse 1 with a simple...

I. "Why God?" (vs 1-11)

And this is a common questions that flows out of our mouth and even from our hearts as we pray to God.

Why God?

Why am I dying with cancer?

Why can't I find a job?

Why did my child die?

Why? Why? Why?

I'm reminded of this every time I get on Facebook after a tragedy...

Just the other day, a young boy drowned in Union...

And I saw one of his friends post....

Why God?

And for most people, it is a natural question.

Unfortunately, unbelievers have no possible answers to these questions.

Their worldview doesn't allow for tragedies.

Often times, they just see it as bad luck, and try to forget the fact that it could happen to them.

Believers are better equipped to answer the questions of why.

First, we know that things happen in the world just because the world is a dangerous place to live.

It is a broken world full of tragedies, disease, and violence.

We also know that death is the result of sin.

People die because they sin.

The only question is are their sins are forgiven or not.

And even though we know those two truths, it is still okay for Christians to ask God why?

Sure, that is exactly what the psalmist does in the first 11 verses of Psalm 74.

Look at verse 1...

Why have you rejected us forever?

Why does your anger smoke against your people?

That is at the heart of this psalm, which is called a Maskil in the title.

And that means that either this psalm was well-written or it was a psalm that made the reader think.

I prefer the latter explanation because it certainly has made me think in my study of it.

And the why question is often a thinking question.

However, a maskil is also known as a teaching psalm, in that it taught Israel wonderful truths about God.

And we would do well to listen tonight and learn more about our Lord.

In verse 2, we learn that this is actually a prayer of an entire congregation.

A few weeks ago we looked at Psalm 13, which was an individual lament.

In Psalm 13, David was crying to God about his own personal issues.

But Psalm 74 is not just a cry of psalmist personally, it is a cry of the entire congregation.

This is a corporate lament to God.

The people are asking why as a group?

And the reason for their question is found in verse 3....

Their enemy had damaged the sanctuary of God.

Now, this psalm was probably written in 500 BC after the Babylonians had come and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.

Not only did they destroy the temple, but they held Israel captive and led them back to Babylon.

And the people are turning to God as a congregation and seeking answers.

Why has God let this happen?

Has he abandoned Israel?

And these are the first questions that most people ask when tragedy strikes....

And I think we need to note something here that is very important to understand about God....

The first thing that most people think when trouble comes is what have I done to deserve this?

And let me add, that is a natural reaction and it is a good reaction...

Sometimes our disobedience leads to discipline.

And in fact, that was exactly the case here.

Israel had disobeyed God and worshipped idols and God had brought in the Babylonians...

To destroy the temple and kidnap the people.

And I say it is good that we look at ourselves first when tragedy strikes...

But I need to add that once we have examined our life and found no sin....

(That doesn't mean we are sin free, but it does mean we shouldn't find a pattern of sin)...

We have to rest in the knowledge that sometimes tragedies come without a clear reason.

Job was stricken but he had done nothing to deserve it.

And that is still true today.

However, the temple had been destroyed for a reason and the people were worried that God had turned away from them forever.

Look at verses 4-6....

The enemy had not only ravaged the temple, they took it over and made it their own.

They hung their signs in the temple.

They destroyed the beautiful wood work in verses 5 and 6...

And then in verses 7 and 8....

The enemy sets fire to everything....

The temple and all the other meeting places in Israel were burned to the ground.

And this is a good place to ask our own hearts this question...

Would we be hurt if our meeting place was destroyed?

Would it bother us if we no longer were able to meet 3 times a week at this building?

Look, I understand who I am asking this question to...

The Wednesday night crowd....

Yall would be here if we met on Mondays at 5 AM...

And that is such an encouragement.

Now, obviously the psalm is not about a church building being destroyed,....

But the problem of the people is that the temple has been destroyed.

And there should be a natural hurt there because they are no longer able to gather and worship the Lord.

And though we live in a different age without temple worship...

There is a common experience when God's people gather to worship Him and fellowship together.

Unfortunately, the trend is not to increase the opportunities to worship.

It is trending in the opposite direction.

Churches that have traditionally met 3 times a week are now at one service a week.

Which seems contrary to Hebrews 10:24-25...

²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

This is the passage that most people turn to when they are encouraging others to attend church.

And I want you to notice something...

The biblical trend is to do what?

Meet more often.

The text says all the more as you see the day approaching.

What day is that? The coming of the Lord.

And guess what? That day is closer than ever before.

And there should be a trend of meeting together more frequently.

Now, look I'm not asking for another opportunity to preach.

I couldn't be the shepherd of my house or this flock if I had to study more...

But what in the world is going on with churches who are cutting out worship services?

Now, that's enough preaching for a Wednesday night...

But I say to you that the people of God should have a constant desire to gather with God's people for worship.

And that is the problem here for this congregation.

They want to know why has God allowed their temple to be destroyed.

And the worst part is that God has also removed his spokesman from them as well.

Look at verse 9...

There is no longer any prophet...

Essentially, God's words were no longer falling on their ears.

We are blessed with Bibles, but at this point in time, God's people heard from God through his prophets...

And they had disappeared.

So, the people start to ask for God to defend his own name in verses 10 and 11...

We would do to pray along these lines as well....

God, we are suffering here, but more importantly, your name is suffering here.

The enemy is winning, Lord.

That is the plea of verse 10.

Your name is being dragged through the mud.

We understand this.

We tell our kids, you represent the family.

When you mess up, our family name is tarnished.

Our pastor is Union was once the youth pastor there.

The name of our church was Philippi Baptist.

Well at the time, they had a friendly rivalry with another church in town, Tabernacle Baptist.

So, our pastor would sit the youth group down and tell them before they went to any big county wide event...

To behave because they were representatives of Philippi Baptist church.

And he would almost threaten their lives.

Then, he would always end with a stern warning....

If you get caught doing anything bad, make sure to tell everyone that you are from Tabernacle.

Israel is pleading with God.

They bad things happening to us reflect on you.

Act now because your reputation is on the line.

And then verse 11 ends this section where it started...

Why Lord do you don destroy the enemy?

Why? Why? Why?

And so that closes the section of this Psalm, the people are crying out Why Lord...

Then the psalm takes a turn...

When we see the words of verse 12...

II. Yet Lord (vs. 12-17)

Notice in your Bibles how the prayer changes here..

If you look at verse 13, 14, 15, 16, 17...

You will see....

You, you, you, you, you...

And we have seen this before....

The people take the focus off of their distress and begin to pray with a focus on who God is.

So, what does the psalm focus on for the next few verses?

The sovereignty and power of God.

Verse 12...

God is a God of deliverance....

He delivered Israel out of Egypt..

Verse 13...

God is a God of strength....

He divided the Red Sea by his power...

How does that make us feel when we compare our small problems to dividing a sea into 2 parts?

Verse 14...

You crushed Leviathan...

We don't have time to go into what Leviathan was, but know that he was the strongest of God's creatures, yet God overpowered him.

Verse 15..

God is God of provision...

He provided Israel with water from a rock...

He dried up the Jordan River allowing Israel passage to the Promised Land.

Verse 16...

God is God of order...

He orders the day and the night.

He keeps the earth moving around the sun.

Verse 17...

God is a God of power...

The seasons change at his command.

And the angle that the sun hits the land moves north and south.

And then notice that God establishes the boundaries of the earth.

All the hand wringing over global warming was that a warmer earth would melt the ice caps...

And the oceans would rise.

Now, if that were the case, rising ocean levels would be a huge problem.

For instance, Lake Murray rises and falls 10 feet annually.

But if the oceans rose just ten feet, 13 million people would be homeless.

However, the ocean's boundaries are set not by global warming but by the hand of God.

He sets the boundaries of the world.

All of this truth about the power of God helps the psalmist regain his focus.

And the psalm takes another turn once he remembers God's power.

Finally, the light bulb above his head goes off.

He has wondered why...

Then he has remembered who God is...

Then it dawns on him...

If we are in trouble, and we know God is powerful,
we need to beg him for help.

And that is how this psalm closes...

III. Please God (vs. 18-23)

There is a panic that you feel when you lose your keys.

Everyone is in a hurry to leave.

But the keys are lost, and there is this inner panic that sets in.

Where are my keys? Where are my keys?

And then there's the embarrassment that some people feel when they realize that their keys were in their pocket all along.

I mean that has never happened to me, but I have heard it happening to people.

And then what do you do...

Well, you stop your search and you take your keys and use them as they were intended.

And in some ways that illustrates the order of this psalm..

The panic is evident in verses 1-11.

Then God is found, though HE was never lost in verses 12-17...

And the calm comes in verse 18...

Compare verse 18 to verse 10...

In verse 10, there's this panic...

How long, God?

Now in verse 18...it has changed to "Remember, LORD."

Two things here....

#1 "Why" has been replaced with "remember"

There is no longer a need to know why.

Just a prayer for the Lord to take notice.

#2 He uses the covenant name for God, Yahweh here.

Though the people were calling on God in the first part of this psalm....

The psalmist uses a different name for God here.

It probably appears in your Bible as the word LORD written in all caps.

This is the personal name of God, which is Yahweh in Hebrew.

Their prayer has gotten more personal.

Nothing wrong with saying O God in a prayer...

But the prayer here changes to Oh, LORD.

There is an intimacy there.

The panic is gone.

The prayer is now a prayer to a God who seems closer than before.

The truth is that He is always close to his people.

We are the ones who cause Him to seem far away.

And then the people ask to protect them in verses 19 – 21.

The congregation is like a turtledove in verse 19.

A helpless bird similar to the sheep of psalm 23.

Who need constant protection.

And the people ask God to remember his covenant with them in verse 20.

We have all been there when our precious little children say to us....

Daddy, you promised.

Those words melt our heart even if it is the most outrageous request.

God, you promised us, which is a reference to the covenant that God made with Abraham.

It is not a threat.

The 3 year old knows nothing of a threat.

She just knows what her daddy said and reminds him of it.

And then verses 22-23 close the psalm with a plea for God to rise and defend himself.

Which is what we know will happen.

Though the world may think that things are turning their way, it is a false confidence.

God wins.

That is the truth of the Scriptures.

Yet, that prayer is a good prayer.

Lord, please silence the ignorance of foolish men.

And I want to close with one last thought.

Most times, a psalm ends with the psalmist reaffirming his confidence in the Lord.

Last week in psalm 2, the psalmist wrote...

How happy are those who take refuge in Him.

A few weeks ago in Psalm 13...

David was anxious but he finished by singing a song.

Yet, in this psalm there is no such line or expression of confidence.

And I want to end by asking you...

What happens when our prayers don't result in God answering our "why" or even acting.

There's an old song that says, "Just a little talk with Jesus makes it right."

And my question is what happens when just a little talk with Jesus doesn't make it right.

What then?

By all appearances, there was no answer to the prayer of psalm 74.

And what should we do in that case?

I would suggest we do what the psalmist did.

When you can't understand why, turn to what God has done in the past.

Look back to the past faithfulness of God and face the future with confidence in Who He is.

At times, we are overwhelmed in the moment, and we are blinded to what God has already done.

In those times, let the panic pass and replace it with what you know to be true about God.

He is powerful.

He is completely in control of all things at all times.

He works together all things to work together for good to those who love Him.

Sometimes, it is in fact good to live in the past when the future looks uncertain.