

PATIENT REFUSING TREATMENT

PSALM 77:1-3 APRIL 11, 2018

Out of the 150 Psalms, there are just 3 that are dedicated to a specific person. All three are addressed to the same man - Jeduthun - a chief musician who was appointed by David to be a part of leading the worship in Israel. We've been taking a look at these three Psalms and have made it through the first two, written by David. We've found that they are pretty intense songs, dealing with profound struggles in life, but also profound truths concerning the power and love of God.

The third and final Psalm dedicated to Jeduthun is number 77. This one is *not* written by David, but by Jeduthun's contemporary and co-worker: Asaph. You've probably heard that name before. 12 of the Psalms were written by him. He was appointed by David at the same time as Jeduthun, only *his* position was not at the Tabernacle of meeting, but at the other Tabernacle, often called the Tabernacle of David, where the Ark would reside until the construction of the Temple under Solomon.

Though this last Psalm addressed to Jeduthun is written by a *colleague* rather than his *king*, it is no less intense than number 39 or 62. In fact, Asaph writes to him an agonizing lament detailing a time when he felt utterly abandoned by God.

When do you know it's time to call the doctor? Each of us probably have a different answer for that question. Some people are quicker to head for the doctor than others. I found an article today that gave 18 signs that it's definitely time to get seen. Things like unusual exhaustion, excessive thirst, bleeding gums, among others.¹

As Psalm 77 opens we see Asaph afflicted and realizing it's time for him to get treatment from his Great Physician. Unfortunately, his condition is severe and there won't be a quick, 5 minute remedy to make everything right again. We'll take the Psalm a stanza at a time and, quite honestly, for a few weeks the text is going to be discouraging on its own. But, luckily, we can look ahead, and as we move through Asaph's words we will keep in mind the truth we already know and that *he* realizes in the end: God is a loving Shepherd and rescue is coming. And, even tonight, as Asaph *begins* his lament, we'll be encouraged by the attentive care that God gives to us when we call out to him.

So, let's begin at verse 1.

Psalm 77:1 - To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph. 'I cried out to God with my voice—To God with my voice; And He gave ear to me.

Asaph's cry to the Lord here is not one of praise or excitement or celebration. Verses 7 through 9 detail what's going on in his heart. He feels utterly separated from God's promises and plans and lovingkindness and, in his heart of hearts, he wonders if things will *ever* get better.

When you read through Asaph's Psalms, you learn a bit about how he thought about things. He really struggled with the fact that the wicked often are successful in this life, while the righteous often suffer. He lived through the reign of David, experiencing all the great spiritual highs of those years, but then he also served under Solomon and saw a shocking decline in Israel's faithfulness to God. We have good reason to believe that his own brother was assassinated by agents of Solomon, and it seems that he suffered some sort of serious physical ailment like kidney disease or a heart

¹ <https://www.redbookmag.com/body/health-fitness/advice/g897/when-to-call-a-doctor/>

condition.² If you'd like to know more about Asaph, there's a great study on the church website you can find called *Asaph's Foibles* that I would heartily recommend.

So he calls out to God, desperately needing help and healing and intervention. Now, here's how we can be encouraged by his experience: Asaph did not have some special 'fast lane' to God that the rest of us don't have access to. We look at his life; he was a *gifted* man, he was a *faithful* man, he was called to a remarkable service not only to Israel, but really he had a remarkable calling in the history of God's people. A *chief* musician, a writer of Scripture. He is called a *seer* in the Old Testament. Yet all of these things did not make him immune from discouragement and they didn't class him separately from any other believer. He had a prominent calling, yes, but his *struggles* were the same and his *access* was the same. Actually, we know that through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit you and I have *greater* access to communion with God at any time than Asaph had for his whole life. He lived with the veil of separation. The hope we have enters the Presence *behind* the veil.³ So, don't allow yourself to think that God puts a few super saints onto His varsity team and the rest of us are left on JV. That's not true. There *are* some who quench the Holy Spirit or fail to walk in His power, but the same spirit is made available to us all. The lanes are open.

Now notice what God did for Asaph at the end of verse 1: "And He gave ear to me." This is a game changing statement. I find that I take this for granted. "God hears when I call." But this is an incredible reality. God not only *can* hear you, He *gives* His ear to you.

A friend of mine was recently in an airport and saw Forest Whitaker. He said hello and got a picture. What my friend *didn't* do was say, "Can I have your phone number?" I mean, a celebrity isn't going to give you that. They *might* give you a selfie with them (though some won't even go that far) but a celebrity isn't going to give you their number. They're not even going to give you their *agent's* number!

Now think about God and how He gives and He gives and He gives. He gives His grace. He gives His mercy. He gave His Son. He gives His Spirit. He gives us wisdom. He gives us life. Asaph comes before the Lord and he's *thundering* and *roaring* at the Lord. He's upset, assuming that the Lord had deserted them and broken His promises and failed in some way. And yet, the Lord still *gave* His ear. He paid attention and listened.

Not only should this fill our hearts with affection for our God, it should also teach us that though God already *knows* what you're thinking and feeling, He also wants to *hear* from you. God wants you to communicate with Him. Paul said in Philippians 4, verse 6:

Philippians 4:6 - ...in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God

We don't need to wait to go to our Great Physician. He knows us, but He wants to hear from us day by day through prayer and praise. He wants you to open up your mouth and speak to Him.

Verse 2 continues:

Psalm 77:2 - ²In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted.

² <http://media.calvaryhanford.com/psalms/asaphsfoibles.pdf>

³ Hebrews 6:19

Asaph was in some sort of *personal* calamity. He called it the day of ‘my’ trouble. And the picture that comes to mind is of a person groping in the dark for a way out. Disorientation is a theme that comes up a few times in his Psalms. He had a hard time understanding why the things that were happening around him were happening. That’s certainly something we struggle with, but it’s not something we *have* to struggle with on a regular basis. It’s not a problem without a solution. Not because life isn’t hard or confusing from time to time, but because God has *already given us* the prescription to treat this disorder. Psalm 119:105. You know the verse:

Psalm 119:105 - ¹⁰⁵Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

When we find ourselves confused about life or feel as if we are in the dark, we are told to go to God’s word for illumination and understanding. If you need to find light at the end of the tunnel, you are to find it in the Scripture, where God has revealed Himself and where He *promises* that if we seek Him, we will find Him. He has not forsaken those who seek Him, but is our refuge, *especially* in times of trouble.⁴

Now, Asaph knew that God is a Revealer. By his own words in his *other* Psalms he said that God speaks and that He shows salvation to those who follow Him and that the Lord guides and counsels and that His truths have been shared from ancient times, generation to generation. So what’s the problem in Psalm 77 where he suggests (in verse 2) that he’s getting no answer? Well, notice the last phrase of the verse: “My soul *refused* to be comforted.” At this moment, it’s not *God* who is failing to treat Asaph, it’s Asaph who is *refusing treatment!* He would tell you that God loves and He rescues and He relieves and He listens and leads. He even says those things *in this Psalm!* Yet, here, he acknowledges that the pain he was in had a lot to do with his *refusal* to follow the Doctor’s orders. He’ll get there in a few stanzas, but he’s not there yet. He admits to us back in Psalm 73 that he struggled with bitterness in his heart. And we should learn from Asaph’s example: Keeping bitterness in our hearts is not going to *help* our spiritual lives, in fact it’s going to harm them. It will distort our thoughts about God and about others. It crowds out of our minds what we *know* to be true about God and it keeps us from receiving the ministry that the Lord wants to do for us. Look at how it effected Asaph.

Psalm 77:3 - ³I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.

Now, we’re going to find that the answer for his discouragement *was* to remember God and the wonderful works of God. But here, as he’s still upset and bitter, when he starts thinking of God it only makes him more upset, leading him to then complain against God, which then made the condition worse and worse, to the point where he says his spirit *fainted*. And so, as the first stanza ends, we see a man defeated, but admitting that he’s in his state because he’s thus far unwilling to be encouraged and given treatment by the Lord.

We don’t want to be people who make that same choice. We *do* have struggles in life. We *do* have troubles and discouragements. That’s normal. As Steven Lawson wrote, “No one is exempt from such shadowy valleys [as we see in Psalm 77], not even the *strongest* saint.”⁵ But, when we find ourselves in a dark night, the answer is to cry out to God and go to the light. It won’t always be an instantaneous fix. It wouldn’t be for Asaph. In fact, as far as the end of his life was concerned, things

⁴ Psalm 9:9-10

⁵ Steven Lawson *Holman Old Testament Commentary Psalms 76-150*

were going to get worse before they got better, but there was a solution available to him. It would be found in the wisdom and the leading and the shepherding of the Lord. And those are processes that can take time. But the alternative for Asaph would be to stay in despair. To stay in a state of confusion. To stay seated in his bitterness and become less and less intimate with his Savior. He doesn't want that, but he has to have these conversations with himself and with God and make *decisions* to remember the Lord and go God's way. To live what we call the Christian life, even when it seemed like it wasn't *working* that day. Because, in the end, if we walk hand in hand with God, He will not only help us and lead us, He will receive us to glory, and there *is* no night there, no more sorrow or tears, no more separation. The ultimate answer, the ultimate cure for everything that has gone wrong with life.

Medical science has come a long way. Some illnesses that had no cure are now solved with simple treatments. There's hope, if you can just get the patient to a doctor and they take the course of treatment. Leprosy is a good example. In previous generations, it was a scourge and a death sentence. Now, you take a few antibiotics and you'll be cured. But it's still an issue. In fact, about 150 people in the *United States* are diagnosed with it each year.⁶ 180,000 are afflicted with it around the globe today.⁷ The treatment is straightforward, but it does take some time: Usually between 6 months and a year before the issue is resolved. But even though it takes time, there's no reason to *stay* a leper. Those who have the condition simply need information and access. Thankfully, the World Health Organization provides free treatment for all people with leprosy, worldwide.⁸

So how can all this apply to us? Well, first of all, here's what we know to be true: We know God loves, He listens, He gives and He is ready to minister to us. From that knowledge, we are able to put ourselves in either Asaph's place *or* in Jeduthun's place.

If you are in Asaph's position, you're struggling in some way. Maybe you're discouraged or confused. Go to your Great Physician and do not refuse His treatment. We can't expect everything to be solved in 5 minutes, but we know the Lord is ready to give His ear and to take us in His hand. Turn from bitterness and instead trust the Lord's power and faithfulness.

But remember Jeduthun too. Asaph wrote up this Psalm and sent it to him. Reading these words, Jeduthun would've seen that his friend was in a time of significant distress. And guess what he could do in response? Well, he could've encouraged Asaph with the other songs he received! Psalm 39 and Psalm 62. He could've reached out to Asaph and reminded him that God is a *refuge*! That God had not forgotten them. That He is a *Rock* and can be trusted at all times. That power and mercy belonged to God and that He moves on behalf of His people. I think that's a message that Asaph needed to hear! It would've been medicine to his heart.

Maybe you're not in a shadowy valley right now. That's great. But *someone* you know is trying to feel their way through the dark. You can comfort them with the comfort with which you've been comforted. You can share the songs that you've already received and learned to help them find their way back to the Lord and back to that place of peace and security. If you're not an Asaph tonight, be a Jeduthun. Either way, we remember the great grace, power and lovingkindness of our God, the Savior, who is an ever-present help in time of trouble.

⁶ <https://www.leprosy.org/leprosy-faqs/>

⁷ <https://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/guide/leprosy-symptoms-treatments-history#2>

⁸ *ibid.*