

PATIENT BECOMING COMBATIVE

PSALM 77:4-9 APRIL 18, 2018

We will be in the second stanza of Psalm 77 this evening, starting at verse 4.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, among the 26,000 significant injuries due to workplace assault in 2013, nearly *75 percent* were reported in the health care and social services sectors.¹ Attacks on doctors and nurses seem to be becoming more commonplace. Injuries caused by violence nearly doubled among nurses and nurse assistants from 2012 to 2014, and as of 2015, across the United States, hospital shootings are now a monthly occurrence.²

A particularly prominent incident took place in Boston on January 20, 2015. Stephen Pasceri, a 55 year old accountant, who lived a normal family life and was involved in his church,³ walked into a Boston hospital in order to confront Dr. Michael Davidson, a young cardiac surgeon with superb technical skills.⁴

Pasceri was convinced that his mother had died the several months earlier as a result of the prescription Dr. Davidson administered following her surgery. Pasceri came upset and unannounced, yet Dr. Davidson welcomed him into an exam room, willing to talk through what had happened, and even invited Pasceri up to the cardiac unit to see how the drug was being used successfully for many patients.

This unscheduled visit meant that Dr. Davidson would have to be late to many of his other appointments that day, but “he understood the confusion that accompanies losing a loved one, and he wanted to help Pasceri find clarity and peace.” “[Dr.] Davidson was a rising star, but it was his bedside manner that set him apart...[He] was known for spending hours talking to patients and their families regardless of whether a surgery ended flawlessly or something went wrong.” A colleague described him this way: “He was a visionary, and he saw what was coming down the pike and he knew that we were going to be taking care of very complex patients in a completely different manner than we had ever thought about doing.”⁵

The time, kindness, and explanations that Davidson offered did not assuage Mr. Pasceri. As one outlet reported: “He expected doctors to perform a miracle. When they couldn't, he sought revenge.” After talking with the doctor for about 30 minutes, Pasceri pulled out a loaded handgun, fired twice into Davidson, who, in a final act of heroism, fled the room shouting warnings to the rest of the staff before collapsing and, ultimately, losing his life. The shooter then killed himself, bringing an end to an act of terrible tragedy, utter waste and misplaced blame.

I'm sorry to bring such a sad tale to us tonight, but something similar is happening in our text, at least in the mind of Asaph. By the end of our verses we'll see a man utterly broken and without hope, which would be hard enough, but beyond sadness, Asaph steps into a moment of *animosity* toward the Lord. He will *accuse* God, not only of changing and failing to be true and unfaithfully breaking His promises, but even suggests that God is actively the *cause* of Asaph's pain - torturing him - and not letting him find rest. These are dark words spoken from a time of anguish. And we see that a man who has refused the treatment of his Great Physician is only a few steps away from

¹ <https://www.statnews.com/2015/11/20/patients-violence-hospitals/>

² <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2015/06/30/brigham-and-womens-hospital-shooting/>

³ <https://medcitynews.com/2015/03/dr-michael-davidsons-killer-didnt-just-snap-theres-darker-story-led-fateful-day-brigham-womens/?rf=1>

⁴ <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2015/06/30/brigham-and-womens-hospital-shooting/>

⁵ <http://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2015/01/21/davidson-brigham-bio>

seeing God as his enemy. And so tonight, as we examine Asaph's words, we want to notice where his thinking was incorrect and, instead, remember what *is* true about our God, so that the dark days of our lives will not leave us as angry, combative patients, but as people who trust and hope in the love and the care of our Savior more than ever.

We begin at verse 4.

Psalm 77:4 - ⁴You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

If we think about this for a moment, this is a truly intense accusation. There's Asaph, crying out in sorrow during his day of trouble, and there's God (he says), holding him down and refusing to let him close his eyes to get a moment of rest. Asaph's describing a torture scene here.

Now, *was* God forcefully withholding rest from His servant? Was God the source of Asaph's pain? It's possible for us to feel that way from time to time. Or, at least, to be *angry* in the knowledge that God *could* have prevented our trouble and, for whatever reason, has not. Asaph's frustration gives a personal example of the accusations God receives every day from all around the world, even from our own hearts from time to time: Why does God allow suffering? Why do bad things happen to good people? Where is God when it hurts? These are questions mankind has asked throughout the generations. We ask it at varying degrees in our own hearts. Asaph, in these first 2 stanzas, is coming apart at the seams. And though the Lord *welcomes* us to pour out our hearts before Him, and though He loves us enough to allow us to ask even hard questions of Him, we want to be careful when we start accusing God. Because, as Asaph will remember later in the song, the things he is saying about God are absolutely untrue.

We can look at what Asaph says and suggests about the Lord in this stanza and, one by one, show them to be wrong. That's mostly what I want to do this evening: Dismantle Asaph's accusations so that we remember how great and how wonderful our God is, because at some point in life, like Asaph, we will need to be reminded of what is true when we don't *feel* it to be true. When we feel like we're being *crushed* and it must be God's fault, we have to remember and believe the truth that, in *reality*, God is our Shield and our Savior and our Shepherd.

So here, in verse 4, Asaph says, "God, you won't let me rest."

We know that isn't true. From the beginning of God's dealings with Israel He made it clear that joy and blessing and *rest* were a big part of His intentions for them.

Exodus 33:14 - ¹⁴And [God] said, "My Presence will go *with you*, and I will give you rest."

Joshua 1:13 - ¹³"Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, 'The Lord your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land.'

This isn't just an Old Testament, Israel idea. Jesus said in Matthew 11:

Matthew 11:28-29 - ²⁸Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

This isn't a God who holds our eyelids open. He's the God who wipes every tear from our eyes. A God who accomplishes the work *for us* that we might have rest in Him *every day*.

Psalm 77:5-6 - ⁵I have considered the days of old, The years of ancient times. ⁶I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, And my spirit makes diligent search.

Asaph retreats into nostalgia, hoping to find some comfort there, but instead he's simply met with the realization that the good old days are long gone. And it was true. The glory days of Israel, spiritually speaking, were over. And Asaph personally *did* experience intense sorrow and suffering. I'm not suggesting he was making something out of nothing. But his problem in this first half of the Psalm is his mindset concerning God. The God who *gives* His ear to us. Who leans down from heaven with grace and compassion. Asaph had decided *he wasn't going to accept* the spiritual treatment the Lord wanted to give him back in verse 2 and that led him to start *resenting* God and then *complaining* against God. And now we're into full-blown accusation and misrepresentation of God. And, having backed away from God, he turns to his memories, thinking about when things felt better, but instead of *soothing* him, his memories further amplify his frustration. "I used to be happy. I used to sing songs at night time instead of shed tears." And it says that his spirit made diligent search. He's ransacking his heart, trying to find a way out of his despair. He's meditating. He's searching. From our vantage point we see that's he's *so close* to getting his mind right and having the proper perspective on what's going on, but the problem is, he's already decided that he's angry with God and that God has failed and therefore he *refuses* to be comforted with whatever God is offering. And these verses (4-9) are the result.

One of the most remarkable things to me about this Psalm is how fast he's *going* to turn the corner once he chooses to believe God and trust what he knows to be true. The solution to his sorrow is surprisingly uncomplicated. It's just that in stanzas 1 and 2 he's *blaming* God instead of believing Him. And so, rather than find comfort, he finds only more frustration. Look at verse 7:

Psalm 77:7-9 - ⁷Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more? ⁸Has His mercy ceased forever? Has *His* promise failed forevermore? ⁹Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?

Six painful questions. They reveal Asaph's emotional hurt and his desperation. If the answer to any *one* of these is 'yes', then mankind is truly without hope. The good news is that the answer to each and every one of these questions is a firm and resounding 'no!' Both for him and for us.

Let's see the response of Scripture to each one.

Will the Lord cast off forever?

John 6:37 (in red letters) we read:

John 6:37 - ³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

Will He be favorable no more? We think of the Sermon on the Mount, specifically the Beatitudes where Jesus describes *in detail* the path of the righteous that leads to blessing and favor. Or we see a verse like 2 Corinthians 8:9.

2 Corinthians 8:9 - ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Has His mercy ceased forever?

Ephesians 2:4-5 - ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

Jude 2 - ² Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

Hebrews 8:12 - ¹² For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.

Lamentations 3:22-23 - ²² Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Has His promise failed forevermore?

2 Timothy 2:13 - ¹³ If we are faithless, He [God] remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

2 Corinthians 1:20-22 - ²⁰ For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. ²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, ²² who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Has God forgotten to be gracious?

John 1:16 - ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

2 Corinthians 9:8 - ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?

2 Corinthians 1:3 - ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

James 5:11 - ¹¹ Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

And of course, we see example after example in the Gospels of the tender compassion of Christ. Jesus had lovingkindness for the multitudes *and* for the individual. He was moved with compassion to feed the crowds and to touch the solitary leper.

The answer to each of Asaph's questions is, "no, no, no!" Our God is *not* unfaithful. He's *not* forgetful. He's *not* given up. He's *not* here to rob our rest and torture us and keep us from being

made whole. No, He's the Great Physician, able to minister in each and every case, but not to an unwilling heart. There may be times when we feel crushed and defeated like Asaph does here. But in those times, rather than refuse treatment and rather than become combative patients, rather than try to think on the 'good old days', or convince ourselves that God is at fault for our suffering, we should think of our good, almighty God and remember what is *true* about Him, whether we feel it emotionally or not. As John wrote in 1 John 3: God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. Paul said, "Let God be true but every man a liar." In the next stanza, we'll see Asaph turn a corner in his thinking and that's what will make all the difference, not in his circumstances, but in his soul. He will trade anguish for awe of who God is and what He has done and how He *still* leads His people with kindness, love and grace. And that will pull him out of his spiral and get him back into the security he so desperately needs in these days of trouble. We can do the same and it begins by remembering who our God really is and, rather than fighting against Him, falling on Him, casting all our cares on Him, for He cares for us.