

(How to Understand the KJV Bible) 40 Psalm 77

by Keith Simons

Asaph's psalm teaches us to trust in God's character and power, even in desperate situations, and to remember His past faithfulness and mercy.

Duration: 33:34

Scripture: Psalm 77:1

Topics: "KJV Bible", "God's Faithfulness", "Hope in Desperation"

Description

Keith Simons teaches on Psalm 77, emphasizing the importance of turning to God in desperate times. He explores Asaph's heartfelt cries to God during his troubles, highlighting the struggle between doubt and faith. Asaph recalls God's past mercies and wonders, reminding us that even in our darkest moments, we can find hope by remembering God's faithfulness. The sermon encourages believers to meditate on God's past actions and trust in His promises, reinforcing that God is always present and capable of delivering us from our struggles.

Transcript

Welcome. What happens when our situation is truly desperate? When it seems as if God is unable to show his mercy or his grace or his kindness to us? Asaph wrote a number of psalms for such situations and the one that we're looking at today is Psalm 77. My name is Keith Symons, I'm a Bible teacher from England and you're listening to the next in a series of weekly talks on how to understand the King James Bible using the psalms.

So let's turn to Psalm 77 and as usual we'll go through it verse by verse and word by word, understanding the meanings of the words and its messages and its lessons for us today. So Psalm 77 has an ancient title to the chief musician, to Jedethon, a psalm of Asaph. Jedethon was one of the leaders of the choirs in God's house, the temple, and he was entrusted just as Asaph was with a serious responsibility for the music in the worship of God at God's house.

So we have in this psalm unusually the name of the person who wrote it, Asaph, and the person for whom he wrote it, Jedethon, who led the singers. Verse one, I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice, and he gave ear unto me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord.

We're left in no doubt by that first verse and a half that this is another of these psalms for desperate times, for difficult situations, and yet not without hope. Yes, Asaph cried unto God with his voice and he repeats

that, unto God with my voice, in order to emphasise it. He cried aloud to God, he made his prayer known to God, and if there was anyone else with him they could have heard it too, but he was calling to God, and yet God heard Asaph in that desperate prayer because God gave ear to him.

In other words, God listened to what he was saying, and if we get God's attention, if God hears us, then we also know that he answers that request and that he meets that need. And so Asaph had cried in the day of his trouble, and probably, as we shall see, it wasn't just Asaph's trouble, but a trouble for the whole nation that caused him to seek the Lord. He says, I sought the Lord.

In other words, he turned to God in desperate prayer. The second part of verse two, My soul ran in the night and ceased not. My soul refused to be comforted.

Okay, my soul ran in the night. The word soul translates Hebrew word, which is the usual word for hand, and if you look at the Hebrew, the literal translation means I extended my hand. In other words, I raised my hands to God.

That's what people did when they prayed to God. So he's saying he raised his hands in prayer and he didn't stop. But why did the King James translators choose to express it as my soul ran in the night? Well, they understood it in line with some ancient commentators to refer not raising of hands, but to something different.

And a soul, of course, is a wound, but this is a wound not in his body, but in his soul. And it flowed out in grief. In other words, grief and bitterness and sadness and pain was flowing from this wound that Asaph felt to have in his soul.

His soul, his inner life could not be comforted. There was nothing that could bring ease or comfort to him. Yes, there might be comfort for his body, but his soul, his inner life was truly desperate.

He explains further in verse 13, in verse three, sorry, I remembered God and was troubled. I complained and my spirit was overwhelmed. So to think of God in this situation, although it was necessary for his prayer, it didn't immediately bring him an answer.

He was still troubled. Maybe he was troubled because he remembered God's righteousness and he remembered that he and his nation were sinful people who turned against God. He complained.

In other words, he prayed, he spoke out his complaint, his troubles, and they seemed to overwhelm his spirit, his inner self. He felt as if he couldn't cope. And with that thought, he writes the word *selah*, which we usually take to mean a pause in the song and a point to just think about just how desperate this situation was that Asaph was describing.

Then in verse four, Asaph continues, thou holdest mine eyes waking. In other words, God, you hold my eyes open. I'm praying in the night and I'm tired.

I want to sleep, but you keep me awake in this. I can't sleep, nor can I even continue my prayer. In verse one, he was crying unto God with his voice.

With loud shouts and cries, he was appealing to God. But by the time he reaches verse four, I am so troubled that I cannot speak. And so what does he do when he cannot still cry out aloud to God, when he cannot speak his complaints and his requests and his prayers to God? Well, he can think, he can

meditate, he can consider what happened in the past.

Verse five, I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I remember how our people were led and guided by God in the past, how he looked after them, how he supported them, how he cared for them, how he cared for me as well. Because there was a time in the past, says Asaph, when my night was not silent, with uncomfortably staying awake, disturbed and desperate.

No, there was a time when I sang to God, even in the night. I called to remembrance my song in the night. Yes, I remember when I had grateful thanks to give to God, even in the darkest, most difficult situations.

But not now. I commune with my own heart and my spirit made diligent search. I think these things through, says Asaph.

I commune with my own heart. I'm discussing this matter inside myself, between my thoughts and my heart, my inner self, my inner life. And in my spirit, I'm searching to try to understand what has happened, because the situation is truly desperate.

God said that Israel's people would always be his people. Could the Lord have driven away Israel's people from himself? Verse seven, will the Lord cast off forever? Cast off means to send away, to throw away. Has God given up on the people who he's called to be his own people, the nation that he's chosen as his own possession on the earth? Is that possible? And unbelief says, yes, it's what's happened.

It's what's happened now. But he struggles with that unbelief. He wants to answer the answer of faith.

No, God is true to his promises. God will do everything that he said he will do. God will rescue his people.

Yet still deep in him, these questions, these doubts surface and continue. And will he be favourable no more? Is it possible that God will never show favour again to his people? That the days of God's kindness to Israel have ended? That they've lost their position, their right, their place in his promises? Unbelief says, of course they have. Of course God has lost interest in them.

But faith, trust in God, says that God will show his kindness. That it's only the current circumstances which make it look like this. It's only our thoughts, our emotions which make it look like God has removed his kindness from his people forever.

No, God's kindness is not gone. God still will show favour, just a little while longer, just a little while to wait, and God will act on behalf of his people. But still in verse 8, those questions continue.

Asaph asks, is his mercy, God's mercy, clean gone forever? In other words, has his mercy totally disappeared? Has it gone, never to return? Will God never show mercy again? Unbelief says, look at the circumstances. Look what's happening around you. God isn't showing mercy any more.

He once showed his mercy to Israel's people. Yes, he did it in the days of Moses, in the days of David, in the past. But not now.

Now his mercy is gone. Now his mercy will never return. But faith, trust in God's promises, belief in God's word, trust in the character of God, says God's mercy is not gone.

God will still act on behalf of his people. God has given his promise and will not break it. But Asaph asks questions, even about God's promises.

He dares to ask, does his promise fail forevermore? Has God's promise failed? Has it failed so that God cannot still keep his promises? Unbelief says God's promises have failed. Unbelief says, look at the circumstances, look at your troubles, look at everything that's wrong. But faith turns to the promise of God and says that the God who gave that promise will keep every one of his promises.

He will carry out those promises. He will rescue his people from the current troubles. Those problems, those fears are many.

And Asaph asks two more in verse nine. Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? We pray that God will remember his kindness, his mercy, his grace towards us. Is it possible that God can forget his grace? Of course God doesn't forget his grace.

It's us who forget it. It's us who look at our troubles, look at the difficulties in our life and think that they are too great for God to act. It's God who thinks that there is, it's us who think that there's no way ahead because God sees the way ahead.

But an argument occurs to him at the end of verse nine. Hath he, God, in anger shut up his tender mercies? Maybe there's a reason why God's mercies are not shown. Maybe it's because God is angry with our sins and certainly we are guilty of sin.

Unbelief says yes, God has shut up his mercies. God's anger is total. His mercies will never appear again in our lives.

But faith says no. The God who forgives, the God who loves us will, if we turn to him, accept us back. He will, if we turn back to him, if we put our trust in him again, he will take back that anger and he will once more shower his mercy upon us.

And now with that thought, Asaph pauses with the word *selah*. And then in verse 10, Asaph confesses where he is wrong. And I said, this is my infirmity.

This is my weakness. I've asked all these questions and they are questions of doubt. They are not questions of faith.

I am not trusting in God. I am believing that by some reason, for some excuse, God's forgotten his grace, or God's turned back on his mercy. No, when I turn to God, when I remember God, then I will remember and I will see how he will act on my behalf and on behalf of my nation.

And I said, this is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most high. Yes, God works. His right hand, a picture of his hand reaching out to help his people Israel, to support them and to look after them.

And Asaph declares in words borrowed from verse 11, I will remember these things. And you'll see that the King James version in verse 10 has the words, I will remember in italics to tell us it's not in the Hebrew, but they understand that to come from the repetition of I will remember in verse 11. So in other words, I'm going to remember God's power, God's power to act.

Verse 11, I will remember the works of the Lord. Surely I will remember thy wonders of old. Let me remember the things that God did for Israel in the past, says Asaph.

I'm going to remember the wonderful things that he did long ago, because I know that what God did for Israel's people then, he is well able to do now. What he did in that desperate situation in the past, he can do in this desperate situation now. I'm going to remember it and I'm going to put my mind on it.

I'm going to think carefully about it. I will meditate, he says in verse 12. I will meditate also of all thy work and talk of thy doings.

Oh, now Asaph can speak again. He can speak of the good things that God has done. If sorrow and desperation has previously bound his tongue so that he could not speak.

No, now he will talk of what God has done. Now he will think of what God has done and in that he will see the ways of God. He will know what God is doing and how God will rescue his people.

Verse 13. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary. Who is so great a God as our God.

That has two possible meanings. One meaning of sanctuary is holiness. If that's the meaning, it means this.

Your way, God, is a way of holiness. You're pure, you're perfect, you do everything right and therefore I acknowledge you as a great God, as the greatest God, as the only God and it's to you I give honour and praise. But that word sanctuary could also mean God's holy place, the temple.

And if that's the meaning, then this verse means, God, the place where you are is in your holy place, your house. So I'm going to turn to the house of God. I'm going to face God's temple in Jerusalem and I'm going to pray to you and ask you to act because you are a great God.

There is no one as great as our God, Israel's God. Verse 14. Thou art the God that doest wonders.

You are the God who does wonderful things. The heathen gods can't do that. They worship idols that are not gods.

The spirits behind those idols might do terrible things but they cannot do wonderful things to rescue God's people. Thou, God, hast declared thy strength among the people. God's strength, God's power is evident.

God acts to rescue his people. Verse 15. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.

With thine arm, with the strength of not just your hand now, but with the entire strength of your arm, you've reached out to your people Israel, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. In other words, the tribes of Israel. Two tribes came from the sons of Joseph.

They were Manasseh and Ephraim and there were the 12 sons of Jacob, each of whom gave one tribe. Of course, one of the sons of Jacob was Joseph. And they are the people who God has redeemed or rescued.

When did he rescue them? Well, he rescued them in particular from Egypt, where Israel's people were slaves. And now Esau is remembering. Remembering God's power to rescue his people.

So if God showed that power to rescue his people in the past, well, what about the current situation? What about the troubles that Esau is describing? Will God show his power again? Will God act mightily amongst

them as he did then to rescue them? That's something to think about. Maybe time for another pause with word Selah. Verse 16.

And here Esau is continuing with an account of how God rescued the Jewish people at the Red Sea. You can read the account of that in Exodus chapter 14. Basically, Egypt's army were chasing Israel's people as they left Egypt and they came close to them.

But God opened up the Red Sea so they could walk through where the sea had been on dry land and walk to safety on the other side of the Red Sea. Now, of course, Egypt's army then chased after Israel's people. They went into the sea.

They thought they could go through the sea. But God acted again. He allowed the waters of the Red Sea to flow back and to cover the army of Egypt, destroying that army, but rescuing his own people.

That's the account we're describing. So let's look at verse 16. Psalm 77 verse 16 says this, The waters saw thee, O God.

The waters saw thee. They were afraid. The depths also were troubled.

We may not see you. Maybe our circumstances blind us so that we cannot see what God is doing. But even the water of the Red Sea could see when God acted upon it.

The water of the Red Sea saw him and it parted in two so that a channel or an opening was made in it so that Israel's people could walk through it on dry land. Even the depth of the sea was disturbed by the action of God so that it dried up and that Israel's people didn't walk through in the mud. They walked through on dry ground.

Now the next verse, verse 17, is a bit of a mystery. Is it describing the same thing? Verse 17 and verse 18 I'll read. The clouds poured out water.

The skies sent out a sound. Thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven.

The lightnings lightened the world. The earth trembled and shook. Okay let's look at the words first.

So the clouds poured out water. It rained heavily. The skies sent out a sound, probably the thunder.

Thine arrows, which probably means lightning. Some have suggested it means hail or a piece of ice that poured like rain, also went abroad. Verse 18.

The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven. The lightnings lightened the world. So we've got thunder and lightning again and then we've got an earthquake.

The earth trembled and shook. Now did that happen when Israel's people walked through the Red Sea or rather when Egypt's people, the Egypt's army, tried to follow them through the Red Sea? Well there is an ancient Jewish story that it happened. If that story is correct, then the verses we've just read are the only references to it in the Bible.

When the Bible recounts how Israel's people passed through the Red Sea in Exodus chapter 14, there's no mention of any earthquake, any storm, any thunder. But we can imagine that it might be an accurate story which is only recorded for us here. It may be that Israel's people, that sorry, that Egypt's army, when

they tried and failed to cross the Red Sea, were not just met with the water of the Red Sea flowing back, but with a terrible storm and an earthquake.

Or it may be that these verses are describing a different event when God saved Israel's people. And we have accounts in the Bible of times when God sent storms against Israel's enemies in order to rescue Israel's people. Sometimes that happened in battle when a small army from Israel was faced with a much stronger army from another nation and it looked as if Israel's army would lose the battle.

But then rain came with thunder and lightning at a time when no one expected it because the rains are seasonal in Israel. They only occur in parts of the year. And this extraordinary rain made it impossible for the enemies to defeat Israel.

In fact they themselves, the enemies, were defeated. So the passage may refer to that. It may refer to any time when God has rescued Israel's people.

But what we know and what we see is this, that God worked in a powerful and amazing way on the occasions I've just referred to at the Red Sea and in those battles and on many, many other occasions. God worked in a way that no one could have imagined or guessed. And he took those circumstances which seemed to be circumstances of destruction and of total defeat and he made them into circumstances of victory.

God's ways are not like our ways. They're ways we don't understand. Verse 19, thy way is in the sea and thy path in the great waters and their footsteps are not known.

If God walks across the sea, what an astonishing event that something that doesn't look like it can support any weight supports God because God is supporting the sea. And no wonder if the sea parts or no wonder if like when Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee, the sea remains solid like the solid ground. God can do amazing things to rescue his people.

He's not limited to what we know, what we understand. We may not see his footsteps, we may not understand his ways, we might consider his path to be a path where no one can go, but the things that are impossible to man are possible with God. And that was how at the Red Sea and across the Sinai Desert, verse 20, thou leadest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

God led his people. They were like a flock of sheep. Yes, at times they were wayward, at times they wandered away from God, at times they turned into sin and into wrong things, but God had the power to bring them back just as a faithful shepherd does.

So when his sheep wander, he doesn't abandon them. He doesn't forget his kindness to them. He doesn't forget his duty to look after them.

He doesn't forget the promise that he made that he would be responsible for those sheep. So if an ordinary human shepherd remembers those things, then how can God forget them? The God who led his people through the desert like a flock, he appointed Moses and Aaron to lead them. Moses who governed them and directed them and gave them their law and told them how God wanted them to live.

Aaron who led them in their worship of God and in their prayer and showed them how they could meet with God and how they could know forgiveness of their sins and a right relationship with God through the sacrifices that Aaron carried out at God's tabernacle, God's house, God's tent in the wilderness. And if

God led his people like that in the past, Asaph thinks, then God is more than able to lead them in their desperate and difficult situations now. Those circumstances look impossible to man, but they are not impossible to the God who looks after and leads and guides his people.

Please write to me. My email address is 333kjb at gmail.com. That's 333kjb at gmail.com. And now let me read to you the whole of Psalm 77. I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice, and he gave ear unto me.

In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord, my soul ran in the night and ceased not, my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God and was troubled, I complained and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah, thou holdest mine eyes waking.

I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night.

I commune with mine own heart and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off forever? And will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Does his promise fail forevermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. And I said, this is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most high.

I will remember the works of the Lord. Surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work and talk of thy doings.

Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary. Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art a God that doest wonders. Thou hast declared thy strength among the people.

Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. The waters saw thee, O God.

The waters saw thee. They were afraid. The depths also were troubled.

The clouds poured out water. The skies sent out a sound. Thy narrows also went abroad.

The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven. The lightnings lighted the world. The earth trembled and shook.

Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leadest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

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