

Ready To Remember

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us just for a wee while to turn back to Psalm 77, and I'm going to read again at verses 10 to 11. Then I said, I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your wonders of old.

Our title this evening is Ready to Remember, and as I said, we're going to be looking at Psalm 77 as we look ahead to next weekend, our communion weekend, where we'll be sharing the Lord's supper together, and we look forward to that very, very much indeed. I love my story, my song. I love hearing you share, people sharing about the difference that it has made to know Jesus in our lives. And I think one thing that every person, every Christian will say is that life is full of so many good things. But the best thing that can happen to you is to come to know Jesus. And that is the testimony of every follower of Jesus, and it was so wonderful to hear Murdoch share about that tonight. And so the best thing that can happen to you is to come to know Jesus, but the Bible teaches very clearly that that doesn't mean that life as a Christian is always easy.

And one of the things that the Bible makes so clear, and one of the things that we all see in our lives as we follow Jesus, is that there are times that are really difficult, and struggles are a reality.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, as Psalm 34 19 tells us. And so although knowing Jesus is amazing, that doesn't mean it's easy. There's times when it's hard, and we get that in our own experience. There's times when we feel really good, and we're full of joy, and energy, and optimism, and confidence. But there's also times when we don't feel like that at all. Times when we struggle, when we feel weak, when we feel far from God. And one thing I would definitely say that, you know, if anybody is looking on thinking at me as a minister, or a Murdoch, or anybody else as a Christian thinking, oh, they've got everything together, they never struggle. Well, you're definitely wrong, because we all, all struggle. And we face the problem of our own sinful nature that we're battling against. We face the problem of the fact that the world around us is broken by sin, and the fact that God's people are always, always in the sights of the devil for attack. And that's exactly the situation that we find in Psalm 77. The psalmist is in trouble. And this is an example of one of the psalms where we don't actually know what the problem is. And that's actually very, very reassuring, because sometimes if you know the specific problem behind these psalms, then you might think to yourself, well, my situation is different. I love the fact that we don't actually know what's going on, but that doesn't matter. And it doesn't matter if our circumstances are different, because the key point is that we can definitely relate to what this psalm is saying. The writer is struggling, he's doubting, he's going through a difficult, difficult time. And it's helping us to think through, well, you know, what should we do when we struggle like that? How do we cope when we face these difficulties and struggles in our lives as Christians? Well, as we think about that question, I want us just to look at what the psalmist did in this psalm, because he does three things, and the first two fail, and then the third is successful. He thinks about himself, then he thinks about the past, but then he remembers the Lord. So we'll just go through these one by one briefly together. In the early part of the psalm, you see that he's clearly thinking about himself. Yes, he's in trouble, and at one level, he's doing the right thing. He's crying out to God, aloud to God, looking to God to hear him, and yet for some reason, it feels like it's not working. And so you see him speaking about crying out to God, seeking the Lord, and then at night, his hand is stretched out. I think that's kind of describing the idea of maybe praying in the middle of the night, looking for an answer, and yet he says, my soul refuses to be comforted. When I remember God, I moan. When I meditate, my spirit fails.

He just feels overwhelmed. Things seem to be getting worse rather than better. And in verse 4, it talks about, it speaks about him not being able to sleep, and eventually so troubled that he can't even find the words to express how he feels. So in everything described in these opening verses, he's, yes, trying to find God and trying to speak to God, but things are not improving, and if anything, things are getting worse. What's going wrong? Why is all this happening?

[5 : 22] Well, I think the thing that we maybe want to try and notice in these opening verses is that, although the psalmist seems to be seeking God in some ways, I think it's maybe the case that in these opening verses, his focus is actually much more on himself and on his situation. And one of the things that I think brings that out is that if you look at the amount of times he refers to himself, I think it's 14 times in these opening verses you have the word I or me, I, my, my, I, I, I, I, my, my, I, I. And so in so many ways, there's just this kind of introspection as he looks at himself, his situation, and he spirals deeper into despair. And so yes, he wants God to intervene and to fix things and wants God to listen to him, but all the time his focus is upon himself. And this is maybe telling us that the psalmist's actions aren't wrong in that he's calling out to God, but his mindset seems to be wrong. He was right to pray, but he was wrong to do that with so much focus on himself. And this is a pattern that we actually see several times in scripture, people who are struggling, and yet their focus just seems to be more towards themselves.

Good example is Elijah. So he has this great moment of triumph against the prophets of Baal at the top of Mount Carmel. But afterwards, he is threatened by death with a message from Queen Jezebel. He flees, and it culminates him with him saying to God, it's enough, take my life away, I'm no better than my father. Similar pattern again in Jonah. When Nineveh responded in repentance to his preaching, he was angry, and he says to God, is this not what I said to you when I was in my country? Is this not why I made haste to flee to Tarshish? I knew you're a gracious God. Please take my life from me. It's better for me to live than to die. And you even arguably see the pattern in Adam way back in Genesis 3, that when he felt ashamed of his sin, he hid because he was afraid. I knew I was naked. I hid myself.

In all these examples, you've got people speaking to God, but it's not working, and their focus is much more on themselves. And that is teaching us a big lesson that I think is important for us to think about that there's a danger that too much focus on ourselves or allowing ourselves to kind of spiral into an introspection that loses all perspective can hinder our relationship with God, and it can absolutely prevent us from finding comfort. And what can happen is actually we can do things that seem right, and they actually make us feel worse. There's a fascinating statement in verse 3 of this psalm where he says, when I remember God, I moan. And you think, that doesn't sound right. You think, well, surely remembering God would make him feel better. But he's like, when I remember God, I moan. And you think to yourself, can that happen? Can remembering God make us feel worse? Well, it can, because if our focus is maybe too much on ourselves, there are times where we'll maybe, we'll think about God, and then we'll think, oh, I haven't prayed enough. Or, oh, I haven't been at church as much as I should have. I haven't kept up that Bible reading plan that I thought I was going to do. Oh, I've done all these things that I said I would never do again. I've made the same mistakes again. And so we remember God, and it makes us feel worse, because we just see our faults and our failings. And this can absolutely happen to us when we think about coming to the Lord's table.

We examine ourselves, which we're told to do, and I'll say a little bit more about that in a wee while. But we just see all the ways in which we've stuffed up. We think of God, and it makes us moan. And these words in the psalm are just reminding us that that kind of self-focus is not what God is looking for. And it's interesting that, you know, in a way, it looks as though in verse 4 that God's keeping him awake in order to kind of wake him up out of his situation and his self-focus. And so the psalmist here is just all introspective, seeing things going wrong, seeing his frustrations, and it's not helping him. It's not the right response to his struggles. So then he tries something else. He starts thinking about his past and the past of God's people. You see that in verses 5 and 6. I consider the days of old, the years of long ago. I said, let me remember my song in the night. Let me meditate in my heart.

[10:40] Then my spirit made a diligent search. And so he's looking back to former times when things seem better. He's recalling his song in the night. So that maybe is talking about some kind of time of happiness in his life where things are better. He's trying to focus on this. He's trying to deal with his problems by thinking about days in the past when things are better. Does this help him? Well, not really.

Because it seems to only lead him into a kind of response of disappointment and disillusionment in the present. Because he says, you know, you read these 5 and 6, you think, oh, things are getting better. And then my spirit made a diligent search. And then verse 7, oh, will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable as his steadfast love forever ceased? And even Murdoch spoke a wee bit about that, how, you know, in those days where there was times of great euphoria and then maybe that buzz just faded a wee bit. And we can feel like that where we look back and we think, oh, man, there was days when I had so much more faith and so much more zeal and everything seemed to be so much better. And now, oh, it's not like that. It's not the way it was. And sometimes, you know, we maybe even think, oh, I missed my chance because everything was so much better then. And it's an interesting pattern that we're seeing here that again is echoed in other parts of Scripture that sometimes a yearning for better days in the past can actually just lead to sorrow in the present.

There's a great example from Ezra where the temple had been destroyed when the Babylonians conquered Judah and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. And then eventually they were able to return and rebuild the temple. And so they'd laid the foundation for the temple and everybody was rejoicing because they're thinking, oh, these things are looking better. But then we're told that those who had seen the first house, those who were old enough to remember the old temple, they wept because it seemed so much better in the old days. And again, this is so relevant for us because it's so easy to do this. It's easy to do this as a church. It's easy to look back to days when loads more people came and the church seemed to be so much stronger. And God seemed to be worshipped and honoured so much more in our community and even in our whole nation. And today it seems so different. Today things seem much harder and people seem much more hostile to the gospel. And we think, oh, you know, for Scotland, the best days for the church are in the past. And that can just leave us feeling flat and discouraged just now. And this can definitely apply to us as individuals. We can, I'm sure every one of us in here can think of times when we all felt closer to God than we are today. And so we might think of times when, you know, we really felt just a real energy and love and joy towards the Lord. Amazing things happening, prayers being answered, reading the Bible and every page is just so alive to us. And now it's like, oh, it doesn't feel like that at all. And we feel like back then we were so much better than what we are now. And often, you know, that can be a huge discouragement for us and it can be a huge stumbling block for us because we think, well, I'm not where I was. I'm not where I should be. And one of the huge dangers is that people will respond to that by actually keeping their distance from church and thinking, well, I'm not where I was, so I should just keep away. And again, that just, that's only making it worse and harder. And yet so often we compare ourselves to how things were in the past and we generally will see ourselves negatively.

And again, it's our lesson for us that we need to think about. And at one level, we have to be careful saying all of this because there is so much in the past that's precious. And the Christian church is not about, you know, always just forgetting and ignoring our traditions and our history and our heritage. There is so much there that's precious. But the primary posture of the gospel is always looking forward. We are always those who want to be looking ahead to what God will do, looking ahead to all that God has promised and looking ahead to all the opportunities that lie ahead of us. Paul spoke of that brilliantly in Philippians chapter 3. He says, I do not consider that I've made it on my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The psalmist looked back and he thought, oh man, everything was so much better then. And it left him discouraged and struggling in this moment of difficulty. So he thinks about himself and it just leaves him in despair. He thinks about the past and it leaves him discouraged. But in the middle of the psalm, in verse 10, you have a wonderful turning point. At this moment, the psalmist remembers the Lord. And this is when he realizes what he needs to do. And the main thing that he does is that he remembers what God has done. And so rather than thinking into the past about, you know, times when he seemed to be in a much better place, his focus instead goes to the Lord and what the Lord has done and everything that the Lord has accomplished. And the key change is that in these verses, he stops thinking about himself and he starts thinking about everything that God has done and everything that God is. Then I said, I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the most high. I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes,

I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds. And he comes up with lots and lots of beautiful points. Verse 13, he speaks about God as holy, remembering that God is set apart from everything else. He is pure, he is perfect, he is incomparable.

[17:37] Verse 14, he talks about the fact that God has not kept his distance. Instead, he has revealed himself, making himself known among his peoples. Verse 15 speaks about God's provision of salvation as he's redeemed his people. Verse 16 to 18, speaking about God's power and authority. When the water saw God, they were afraid. The clouds poured out water, the skies gave forth thunder, the crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind, the lightnings lighted up the world, the earth trembled and shook, all pointing to the majestic power and authority of God. And then in verses 19 to 20, his mind goes right back to the exodus, thinking about how God led his people, delivering them and providing salvation for them.

And a key change has happened. Remember we said at the start of the psalm, verses 1 to 4, it was all, I, me, my, I, me, my, my, I, me, my. And in the second half of the psalm, it all changes because you see, you're, you, you, you, you're, you, you, you, all the way through, you're, you're, you're, you.

All the focus moves on to God and what he's done. And the key thing that he does is that he remembers the Lord. You see that in verse 11, I will remember the deeds of the Lord. And that term remember is actually an extremely important concept in the Bible. When we think of the word remember, we tend to just think of not forgetting something and so recalling it to our, to our minds. But in scripture, remember goes further than that. And so when the Old Testament speaks about remembering, it doesn't just mean thinking about something. It also speaks of acting upon that reality. And so it's not just a matter of thinking about something, it's thinking in a way that then shapes your actions. It's not just a matter of thought, it's a matter of action. And so there's lots of good examples. There's the command to remember the Sabbath day. That's not just to think about the Sabbath day, that's to live out, live out in a way that keeps one day a week holy to the Lord. When God came and remembered Noah at the flood, it wasn't just to think, oh yeah, Noah, he's, he's floating about. It's actually to take action so that the flood subside and they will be safe. And when the Psalms speak of God remembering his promises, his covenant promises to Abraham, to Moses, to David, it's all pointing us to the action that God has taken. And it's all reminding us that when the biblical, when the Bible speaks about this whole concept of remembering, it's talking about something that actually makes a difference.

Remembering is powerful. And that's exactly what you see in this Psalm. As he struggles, when he remembers what God has done, it transforms his situation. And I just want to say that that's, I think, a key part of why we are commanded by Jesus to remember his death in the Lord's Supper.

He took bread. When he'd given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And as we do that, as we remember what Jesus has done, one of the key things that we're doing is taking our eyes off ourselves. And instead, our eyes are going to the cross, where we think about everything that Jesus suffered, everything that Jesus accomplished, everything that Jesus was willing to do for you and for me.

[22 : 00] And that's the amazing thing about the gospel, is that when we come to Jesus at any point, and particularly as we come to the Lord's Supper, we are never coming saying, I, me, my.

We're never saying to God, I am finally in a better place spiritually. My life is actually sorted.

And if you look at me, I think you'll be pleased because I've managed to get this right and that right and understand this and sort out that. We never, ever come to the Lord saying that.

Instead, we come to the Lord's table with a long list of mistakes in our lives and with probably many mistakes that we've made again and again and again and again.

And we come feeling weak and we come feeling like failures and we come conscious that there's so many things that we thought that we would do differently and yet we failed to do that.

[23 : 17] And we come to the Lord's table with all of that baggage and yet we come to the Lord's table saying, You, you have done everything I need.

You have, you have given your body and blood to save me, Lord Jesus. You, Father, have sent your Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

You, Holy Spirit, have promised to be with me and never, ever leave me. And that's what we rest on. And that's what we rejoice in.

And that's what we want to remember so that it fills our minds. It's so interesting. When we come to the Lord's table, we will talk a lot about examining ourselves because it tells us to examine ourselves.

So in 1 Corinthians 11, the passage that we often read when we come to the Lord's table, it will speak about, you know, Paul's instruction. Let a man, let a person examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

[24 : 41] And so you think, well, to almost everything you've said is nonsense because you're saying don't think about yourself and then it says examine yourself. But you have to read the next sentence because it says, Let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. So, when it speaks there about examining yourself, the purpose of the self-examination is not to look through all your mistakes and failings and weaknesses and all your regrets.

The purpose of the self-examination is to make sure that you're doing this. discerning the body.

And what does that mean? It just means you need to examine yourself to make sure that you're thinking about Jesus. That you're coming to the Lord's table and remembering him and everything that he has done for you.

And that is the amazing joy that as we share in the bread, as we drink the wine, we are not actually sitting there thinking about the long list of mistakes in our lives.

[26 : 05] We are actually sitting there celebrating and rejoicing in the fact that Jesus has dealt with them all. And as we eat that bread together, we are remembering that Jesus giving his body was in our place.

And as we drink that wine, we think of the fact that his blood washes away all our sins. And we sit at that table, not thinking, I, me, my list of mistakes is massive, but we think you, Lord Jesus, have done everything.

And so, that's why, you know, when we think about, you know, I think, you know, Murdo spoke about becoming, when he became a member of the congregation, you know, and he said, you know, it's a step, it's a daunting step, it's something that people find hard, you know, to say, well, I want to actually publicly say that I, I'm a Christian and that I'm following Jesus.

And so often the thing that will hold us back is that I question. You think, well, do I know enough? Can I say enough? Have I had a big experience? What do I say? And everything.

And I am pretty certain that, that when Murdo and any other went to meet with the elders to say that he wanted to become a member, I don't think for a second he would have said, I, he would have said, Jesus, he has done everything and he has saved me.

[27 : 36] And that's, that's the amazing thing is that as we profess faith in Jesus, we're not actually there professing anything about ourselves.

We're actually there just to talk about him and everything that he's done for us. So we can look forward together to sharing in such a precious moment. And as we look ahead to next week, you will all be so, so welcome to come along to your service.

And if there is anybody who would like to think and talk about coming to the Lord's table for the first time, please just message me or speak to me and we can chat it through. And as we, as we go into this week, we want to remember the wonderful truth highlighted in Psalm 77, that as we rest on what the Lord has done for us, we find peace and joy.

Amen. Let's pray.