

Transience and Permanence

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[0 : 00] Psalm 102. The subtitle of the psalm says, A prayer of one afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

It's a pretty descriptive title. Did you use this one when it started with three? It was 103. I don't think it was 102, yeah. Yeah. Oh, I think we used 103 in the service maybe?

Yeah. Yeah. All right, let me read it out loud. It says, Hear my prayer, Lord. Let my cry come to you.

Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me. Answer me speedily in the day when I call. For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace.

My heart is struck down like grass and has withered. I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my flesh. I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places.

[1 : 11] I lie awake. I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop. All the day my enemies taunt me. Those who deride me use my name for a curse. For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink because of your indignation and anger.

For you have taken me up and thrown me down. My days are like an evening shadow. I wither away like grass. But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever.

You are remembered throughout all generations. You will arise and have pity on Zion. It is the time to favor her. The appointed time has come. For your servants hold her stone dear and have pity on her dust.

Nations will fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory. For the Lord builds up Zion. He appears in his glory. He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer.

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord, that he look down from his holy height, that from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who are doomed to die, that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord.

[2 : 32] And in Jerusalem his praise, when peoples gather together in kingdoms to worship the Lord. He has broken my strength in midcourse.

He has shortened my days. O my God, I say, take me not away in the midst of my days, you whose years endure throughout all generations. Of old you lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away. But you are the same, and your ears have no end.

The children of your servants shall dwell secure. Their offspring shall be established before you. Job 14, 1-2 says, Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

He comes out like a flower and withers. He flees like a shadow and continues not. It's kind of a sad outlook on life, right? But even for those of us who seem to live charmed lives with everything kind of going their way, even they experience plenty of suffering and heartache in this life, in this short life that we live.

[3 : 53] And sometimes the hardships of life can leave us feeling hopeless and depressed. And Psalm 102 really comes from the perspective of someone that's in that kind of a place, between a rock and a hard place.

That's why the title of this psalm says, A Prayer of One Afflicted When He's Faint and Pours Out His Complaint Before the Lord. And the main message of the psalm that the Lord is trying to teach us is that the eternal life of God, His will, gives us hope in the midst of our temporary existence.

So like in the first section, verses 3 to 10, we see our transience, our temporary fleeting nature of our life. And then verses 12 to 22, we see God's permanence, His unchanging eternity.

And then in the last section, we see that salvation offered towards Christ's salvation. So 1 to 2 is kind of what introduces the body of the prayer. It's an introduction.

It says, Hear my prayer, O Lord. Let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me. Answer me speedily in the day when I call.

[5 : 06] In the day of distress, this is instructive for us. Because in the day of distress, when we are distressed, instead of turning to our own resources, instead of turning to other people, other confidants for help and support, the psalmist here is turning to the Lord with an urge and cry for help.

And this is counterintuitive, right? Because sometimes when feeling down or overwhelmed, that's exactly when we don't want to go to God. But here, precisely when he feels the most needy, when he's in distress, he says, when he feels abandoned by God, that's exactly when the psalmist turns to him and cries out to him all the more.

And then verses 3 to 11 give us the reason for the psalmist's desperate prayer. He describes his suffering this way. He says, For my days passed away like smoke.

My bones burned like a furnace. My heart is struck down like grass and is withered. I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my flesh like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places.

I lie awake. I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop. So he feels like he's this vapor, like smoke that's just kind of vanishing into thin air.

[6 : 20] He feels like he's about to fade into oblivion, die and disappear. And he seems to have some kind of physical illness as well. So he says his bone feels like a furnace.

He's got fever. He's downcast. He's like a withered, burnt up grass. And his suffering is so bad, he forgets to eat. And he's so thin now from not eating that his skin is sticking to his bones.

And because in his days, sickness was regarded often as a punishment for sin, he's also being ridiculed and mocked and cursed by those around him. And his name is being used as a curse.

So he's facing not just physical suffering, but also social suffering. And so he feels like a lonely desert owl, he says, is being taunted. But that's not the worst of it.

The worst of it all is in verse 10. Because of your indignation and anger, for you have taken me up and thrown me down. The psalmist believes in the sovereignty of God, and because of that, he feels that ultimately, God himself is responsible for his suffering.

[7 : 30] Because he's not outside of his control. And that's what's most difficult for the psalmist, because he trusts in God. And this God in whom he trusts, he's using his might, he feels like, to afflict him.

And so he feels deep sorrow, maybe even a sense of betrayal. And again and again, in this section especially, the psalmist highlights kind of the fleeting nature of his life, human existence.

He begins and ends with that, that same idea and phrase. In verse 3, he says, my days pass away like smoke. Again, in verse 11, at the end he mentions, my days are like an evening shadow.

Same thing in verse 4, he says, my heart is struck down like grass and has withered. And in verse 11, he says, I wither away like grass. I mean, you guys, we've all seen grass before, right?

And you, grass springs up one day, but another day, it's cut down or scorched by the sun or it's frozen dead another day. It's a great picture of fleeting existence.

[8 : 36] And that's how the psalmist feels. And this, this kind of transience of psalmist, of human beings is contrasted in the next section by the permanence and eternity of God.

Verse 12 says, but you, so that's a contrast, but you, O Lord, are enthroned forever. You are remembered throughout all generations. So verses 1 to 11 were full of all these first person pronouns, right?

I, my, right? But then in verse 12 to 22, the focus is on the name of the Lord. The phrase name of the Lord occurs twice, verse 15 and 21. And the word Lord, which is the, in Hebrew is actually the proper name of God, occurs seven times in this section.

So I am dying, you know, my days are fleeting, but the Lord reigns forever and he will be remembered and worshiped through all generations. That's the contrast that's being drawn. And this permanence of God is what then becomes the basis for the psalmist's confidence and trust as he continues in his prayer.

So he says in verses 13 to 17, you will arise and have pity on Zion. It is a time to favor her. The appointed time has come for your servants hold her stones dear and have pity on her dust.

[9 : 49] Nations will fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory. For the Lord builds up Zion. He appears in his glory. He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer.

So even though that kind of the first section felt like a personal individualistic song, like here we see the corporate dimension because his suffering is tied up with the kind of the destruction of the people of God.

And so because the city of God is in ruins. And because psalmist knows that he belongs to the people of God and he knows that God has made a covenant with his people and promised to come to their aid, because of that connection, he feels confident that the Lord will come to his aid because he will come to the aid of his people.

So even though he feels like God has abandoned him, the psalmist knows about the covenant and that he knows that God reigns forever. And if God reigns forever, that the city of God where God has chose to put his name is not going to remain in ruins forever.

So that's kind of his logic. God's not going to leave this city ruined forever because it's his city and he's still reigning. He's still in power. He's not been overthrown. And so he trusts that God will show pity and favor to his people.

[11 : 04] So he continues in verses 18 to 26, Let this be recorded for a generation to come so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord that he looked down from his holy height from heaven the Lord looked at the earth to hear the groans of the prisoners to set free those who are doomed to die that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord and in Jerusalem his praise when people was gathered together in kingdoms to worship the Lord.

Because the Lord reigns forever, the psalmist wants his words to be written down for future generations' sake that they too may worship the Lord and because he knows that Zion will be restored the city of God and the prisoners will be freed and then once again kingdoms all over the world and all the peoples of earth will gather in Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

And then in the last section 23-28 the psalmist summarizes the entire psalm again. So in 23-24 we see him lamenting his fleeting life again.

He has broken my strength in midcourse. He has shortened my days again. Oh my God I say take me not away in the midst of my days you whose years endure throughout all generations.

So he prays that God whose years endure forever would not shorten his days. But then in verse 25-20 he turns his attention again to God and his permanence.

[12 : 25] Of old you laid the foundation of the earth and heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe and they will pass away.

But you are the same and your ears have no end. The children of your servants shall dwell secure. Their offspring shall be established before you. So even the seemingly permanent sky and earth will wear out like a garment.

God will change them like a robe. They will pass away but the Lord remains the same. And this is a really helpful image because we all have clothes that we have outgrown or that have been worn out that we've tossed.

Socks get holes right where the toes are. Jeans get holes right around the knees or the pockets or shirts, t-shirts get holes under the armpits or colors get crinkled or stained.

And we change them out. We change that clothes. That's what we do. They get worn out and we throw them out. We change them out. And that's what heaven and earth are like. That's what human beings are like.

[13 : 33] Our suffering will pass. Our circumstances will change and we will all die. But through it all our God will remain. He reigns forever. He does not change.

That's what we call the immutability of God. He doesn't change. That's an attribute of God. He's immutable, permanent. And a great Dutch theologian named Herman Bavinck puts it this way.

He says, quote, The doctrine of God's immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the creator and the creature.

Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, in Him alone, for only He is pure being and no becoming.

Hence, in Scripture, God is often called the rock. So when your life is constantly in flux, when you're unsure of how you're going to make it through the week or through the day, when you feel out of control, that's what's helpful for us to remember that God is unchanging, that we are becoming, we are changing, but the Lord remains the same.

[14 : 51] He's called like, I am the I am. Yeah, which is actually what the Lord is from, right? The name of the Lord. And He's the same yesterday, today, and forever as Hebrews 13.

Jesus is too. And that's what gives us hope, right? That the children of God's servants shall dwell secure. Their offspring shall be established before God.

And the eternal reign of God gives us hope in the midst of our temporary existence. And what's fascinating is that the last couple verses, verses 25 to 27, are actually quoted in Hebrews 1, 10 to 12.

And there, interestingly, these verses which speak of God are attributed to His Son, Jesus Christ. And this is because of the early believer's understanding of the Son's role in creation, that He's the, that Colossians 1, 16 says, by Christ all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

So the author of Hebrews takes Psalm 102, verses 25 to 27, which says, of old you lay the foundation of earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. And then they apply it to Jesus, saying He's the one who is like this, who remains forever, same yesterday, today, and forever, as it says in Hebrews.

[16 : 06] And that's how this Psalm really points to Jesus for us as we have this, I guess, perspective from, as a new covenant people.

It's that Jesus, as the Father gave it to Him to have life in Himself. So Jesus has life, the eternal life of God in Himself as John 5, 26 says. And whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, right, as John 3, 36 says, right.

And that's the life that He imparts to us and He's able to impart this eternal life because there's that tension, right, of our, that contrast between our temporary existence and God's forever existence.

And there's a tension of how come we as God's people can't, if God reigns forever, how come we die? How come we suffer? How come we fade? And that tension is resolved in Jesus because He's the one that brings eternal life to God's people, to resurrection life by dying for our sins so that we might live forever.

and it's, and that should give us hope as we live in this fleeting existence in a life that is few and full of suffering that we remember that God has offered us this eternal life, resurrection life in Jesus and that should give us hope as we live.

[17 : 34] Let's think about that and then God ■■■ for the time that is and that's who that we Hillary and get