

Who Is Great Like Our God?

Psalm 77

Introduction: Do you know that feeling you get when you think that you are in trouble? That “uh-oh” type of thought you get in your brain? It’s that sensation you get when you look in your rear view mirror and see a police car behind you. What’s the first thing you do? Well, I check the speedometer. I check my seat belt. I recall the exact place of my insurance and registration. And maybe you aren’t as paranoid as me, but I sometimes hold an imaginary conversation in my head with that police officer. I imagine myself giving an excellent excuse of why I was in violation of the law. I picture the police officer nodding in approval and apologizing for even thinking of pulling me over. This sometimes all occurs in my brain, and the police officer hasn’t even pulled me over or turned on his lights! Trouble did not even happen yet, and my brain shoots off like crazy!

People respond to trouble in different ways. When I was growing up, I watched a television show called “Little House on the Prairie.” Perhaps some of you have watched it as well. And maybe you remember what would happen with the main character Laura Ingalls when she would get in trouble. She would burst into tears and she would run away as fast as she could. We didn’t always know where she was running, but that’s not the point – it’s television! – we need drama! So Laura often ran from her problems.

Some others respond to trouble by becoming silent and withdrawn. Some turn angry and outspoken. Whatever the preference is, God gives a challenging insight from His Word when we are faced with problems and trouble. In Psalm 77, we are given a Psalm from Asaph. Asaph was the music director (the OT Kevin Hall) for King David. Asaph was faced with some type of trouble; we don’t know what it was specifically. And Asaph does what any of us would try to do when we are in trouble – we try to find a remedy. So what do we do and what should we do when faced with trouble?

The Problem – Asaph is faced with trouble

His remedies – He calls out to God for quick relief, he remembers the days when God seemed to like him more, and he wonders if God has abandoned him.

Let’s read vs. 1-3. We find out right away by reading this that Asaph is having a lousy day. Thy guy is in distress. He’s hurting. He’s uncomfortable.

We understand this one, right? We get poor Asaph. You have bad days. I have bad days. Even with an awesome boss like Brian and great co-workers like Tim (Tim said he would listen to the recording, so I needed to add that), Amber, Kevin, and Beth, I got days that just stink. Nothing goes according to plan. Maybe there are things that are outside of my control that cause things to go wrong, or maybe everything was in my control, and I blew it. We have about seven billion sinners on this planet, and somebody is going to mess up somewhere, and it might eventually involve you. And even more than a bad day, sometimes we have rough *times* in our life – often caused by our sin.

Look at the Bible, even some of the great, godly people that wrote the Bible. How about Moses? He was a murderer. How do you think he felt when he killed that man? Don’t you think he was great distress as he played that back in his mind? Or what about Jonah? Do you ever think he thought he was having bad day? Think of Solomon. He had a thousand wives and concubines. Do you think Solomon ever wondered while in an argument with concubine #887 over her Valentine’s gifts, why he married all these women? You could keep that list going on and on. Everyone runs into bad times and everyone faces trouble – whether it is your fault or not.

Explanation: Asaph faced with serious struggles cries out to God. Sometimes you will hear people say, “I am at the end of my rope.” You know, believers are never ever at the end of their rope because our rope is connected to God – you are tied to him. Asaph knows that God hears him (vs. 1), but that doesn’t end the trouble. The author is still looking for answers. Asaph’s hand is stretched out in the night. We basically see that Asaph is calling out, hands outstretched to God. And in vs. 3, we see that he remembers God, and he is troubled. He meditates, and his spirit is overwhelmed. And you know what? Isn’t this a lot like what we face? We pray to God, and we know He hears us, but then we open our eyes, and the trouble is still there. We don’t always get immediate relief, do we?

Application: We should briefly pause here and realize something. God does not promise instant answers to prayer. We are not promised in God’s Word that we will always avoid suffering. Obviously Asaph was in some trouble. He had some concerns, and he wasn’t getting answers right away. Why is that? Well, I don’t know all the reasons, but one that does quickly leap in my mind, is that God wants us to trust him. He wants us to live by our faith. We live in age of instant answers. If I don’t know something, I can talk to my phone, and it will spout out the answer. If we need something, we can get it nearly right away. God does not operate like that. He wants us to call out to him and trust that he will guide us. A friend once told me something that has stuck in my

head – God will be a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path, but he doesn't promise to spotlight the trail for us so we can see miles ahead. He wants us to trust Him.

Relief doesn't come quickly to Asaph. In the next few verses, Asaph doesn't hold back. He tells the Lord what He is thinking. As often is when you are in trouble, sleep does not come easy. In vs. 4, Asaph tells God, "You are holding my eyelids open!" Many of you can relate – when you are in trouble you or you have created trouble – your mind starts working – especially at night.

He tries another remedy. In vs. 5, he remembers the days when God seemed to like him and his people better. Perhaps Asaph is advanced in years, and he thinks back to when he was younger. As my dad would say "those were the days."

In vs. 6, Asaph does what he knows best. *Read vs. 6.* He recalls his favorite songs. However, nothing seems to calm his soul.

Asaph begins to ask deep questions of God. *Read vs. 7-9.* He wonders if God has abandoned him in anger. As you see in these verses, these are words that question what God is doing. He asked if God's love & mercy had ceased. He asked if God will be favorable to him again. He asked if God's promises are done. Will God be gracious again? Will God stop being kind?

Is it wrong to ask God questions like this? No. Asking tough questions about God's character will point you to truth because there are answers. It's part of a relationship with God.

Will God never be favorable? *Psalms 34:1 - Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*

Has God's love forever ceased? *John 3:16 - God so loved the world He sent His Son to us – God is love. '*

Have God's promises stopped? *Psalms 86:15 - But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

Will God not be kind? *Isaiah 41:13 - For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you.* Tough questions to God provide amazing answers.

Illustration: I can talk to my wife or close friend and ask tough questions – I can ask things that I am thinking or I can relate things that are on my heart because I am looking for answers. As we study Asaph's questions, he has been thinking about them for a long time. He has been dwelling on them in the night. He is pleading to the Lord for answers.

Application: Many of you have a close friend that you can tell things to that you would never tell anyone else. You have told that person the thoughts of your heart – it is a great friend to have because you know that person won't judge you or think poorly of you. That's a deep relationship. Part of a deep relationship is revealing what you think to the other person. *The great thing is that God has already done that for us.* We can know so much about God that he wrote us a letter about Himself that's over a 1,000 pages long! He tells you about Himself, and now He wants to know you. He wants you to tell him your thoughts, needs, wants, desires, plans, and questions. That's a deep relationship, and the church has spent centuries unfolding everything that God wants for us, and we spend our whole life learning more about God, and it never stops. We keep learning. For instance, March Madness is coming up. Last year, Melissa and I filled out our brackets together for the basketball tournament. We were watching a game, and Melissa noticed a team was in foul trouble, and she told me they were in the "double bonus." It took me years of watching basketball to even understand the "double bonus", but Melissa already knew what that meant. I was floored. I learned something new about her. God wants us to keep learning about him. Keep asking questions. When you are in trouble, call out to God and tell Him all of your heart.

Transition: In response to his trouble, nothing that Asaph did was wrong. He asked God for quick relief, but it didn't come. He thought back to good days – perhaps to calm him. He asked tough questions of God – and he would find there was an answer to every one of them. What he does next becomes his solution to his long-lasting trouble.

The Solution: Remember what God has done. (vs. 10-20)

Remember God's truth and remember God's faithfulness

Explanation: Look at what Asaph decides to do. *Look at vs. 10-12.* I will remember, I will remember, I will ponder and meditate – three times Asaph says that he will bring back to his mind the wonders and the works that God has done in his life.

What's the first thing that Asaph thinks of when He starts to dwell on what God has done. *Read vs. 13.* The first thing he thinks of is, wow, who is great like our God? No one compares. Asaph is saying that no false god, no idol, no substitute for the supreme God can even come close to Him. Nothing else compares. It is a beautiful statement. *Followers of Jesus belong to the best.* You want to go somewhere else for answers? It won't be as remotely close to being as good as God. A child of God is in the Almighty's family.

As Asaph thinks back in the past, the greatest story of Israelites comes to mind. It is when God redeemed His people and saved them out of bondage from the Egyptians. *Read vs. 14-15.* Here we see the God of wonders and the omnipotent God taking care of His people.

Now this is where Asaph grabs his musical and poetical abilities and starts to use them. *Read vs. 16.* What is he saying? When the waters of the Red Sea saw God, they were afraid, and they scrambled out of the way. Those Red Sea waters ran for their lives when they saw God leading the way for Hebrew to cross the sea. Asaph is employing a poetical device *anthropomorphism*. Remember that from high school? He is personifying the water by giving it feelings. That water wants nothing to do with being in the way of God. He is showing that God is in complete control.

In the next two verses, God is being seen through a great storm. We don't know when this was, but Asaph remembers this storm. He recalls how God's power was seen through this massive thunderstorm.

And then, in the last two verses of the Psalm, Asaph brings his song to a quiet close. *Read vs. 19.* What is this verse saying? God led his people through the sea. Who can do that? Whose path can be through great waters? Only God. This last phrase is so beautiful – *and thy footsteps were unseen*. God did this unbelievable thing – parting a gigantic sea, and no one ever physically saw Him do it. No one saw His footsteps. When someone does something amazing, you hear about their efforts. When someone receives a commendation for heroic action in a battle, the soldier's actions are recounted based on what people saw. There is a record. Yet God did something so miraculous, but no one even saw Him.

As we come to the last verse, Asaph is calm. *Read vs. 20.* He is completely different from the turbulent, sleepless person we saw at the beginning of the song. Asaph is content knowing that God, as our Shepherd, led his people by Moses and Aaron. In the midst of massive upheaval – the Israelites leaving everything they had ever known to follow *God into the desert* – God took care

of them. As they went through *life in the wilderness*, God took care of them. As they went into the *Promised Land filled with enemies*, God took care of them. God took care of them. God takes care of us. Asaph begins the song upset and troubled; he ends the song content and fulfilled by remembering what God has done.

Illustration: By looking back to the past, it often gives us a very good idea of what will come in the future. Businesses look at statistics and trends to project growth or decline for the future. When you exercise or prepare for a race, you know as you train how far you can go and how fast you can go. That helps you go farther and go faster because you have that experience to draw from. But sometimes those things fail. Businesses might have a lots of stats and trends, but sometimes the unexpected happens, and their projections are wrong. You might know how hard to train for that race, but one day you pull a muscle and you can't run as fast. Humanly speaking, the past doesn't always guarantee what will happen next because we all fail. You need someone who has never failed – that's our God. Asaph know by looking at a perfect God and the works he has done in the past, God will work in his life and life of his people in the future.

Application: We need to remember what God has done. We need to look back and see the victories that God has done – *in order to move forward*. I love hearing stories of what God has done in this church. We have some people that have attended this church for many years, and they can tell you some amazing things that God has accomplished here. They can tell you the people whose lives were changed, they can tell you about the wonderful servants and saints of God that labored for the Lord in this church. That is wonderful. I have been here for only 8 months, and I love hearing stories of "back in the day" at First Baptist or stories of how God did a work in their life that radically changed them. Those are good for me to hear. But you know what? I want to add some more stories of our awesome God to the collection. We know God will be faithful and true to us because he has been faithful and true for thousands of years to his people, and he hasn't failed them *once*. Perhaps you are new to all this Bible stuff. Explore the Bible. Ask questions – even the hard ones. Followers of Jesus know their God is great. They have experienced the answered prayers; they have seen God do work. The last half of the Psalm speaks of things that God has done for the Israelites. It talks about the exodus from Egypt and the time the Lord provided for His people in the wilderness. Why does God want us to remember all of those things? Here it is. The point of the message – why does God want us to remember all of those things? He wants us to remember those things so we will know that God will keep working in the future. He is not done molding us and changing us to

be more like him for his glory. Asaph was content at the end of the psalm because he knew that God was going to keep working.

We tell those stories from the past not to be content that we have seen enough of God working, but to know that He is not done. This gets me pumped. God's not done working in any of us. You might say, George, "I have sinned a lot; I have messed up a bunch." God's bigger than that. Repent of your sins and seek God. He will forgive. As a youth pastor, this delights me for the next generation. Teens, God has done great things for his glory throughout history when people turn from their sins and seek him with a whole heart – no matter your circumstances, your education level, or how popular you are. I want to add some stories to the collection of God working in your life, in your family, in this church and in this town. I want to see God work in a big way. And it can happen because who is great like our God? Lay hold of God's promises today. Know that he is loving, gracious, compassionate, and faithful to those who turn from their sins and come to him. You know one thing this Psalm did not talk about? It didn't record God's answer to Asaph's troubles. We don't know what happened. Why? God wants us to trust Him. Live by your faith. Depend on your God. Remember what he has done for you.

The response to this should be one of excitement. God still has us here; last time I checked, we are all still alive. We are here – that means God has a plan, and He has an agenda for the body of First Baptist Church. God wants to use us for Him today, right now. Let's pray.