

# Will You Remember?

by Rev. John C. Cheek



*Prayer by Graham Dean*

## Prayer

All who thirst, come to the water.  
Come, all who are weary; come, all who yearn for forgiveness.  
The Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ has washed over us,  
and our gracious and holy God beckons and blesses us.  
Drink deeply of these living waters. Amen.

## Scripture: Psalm 77:1-2, 11-13 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>I cried out to God for help;  
I cried out to God to hear me.  
<sup>2</sup>When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;  
at night I stretched out untiring hands,  
and I would not be comforted.  
<sup>11</sup>I will remember the deeds of the Lord;  
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.  
<sup>12</sup>I will consider all your works  
and meditate on all your mighty deeds."  
<sup>13</sup>Your ways, God, are holy.  
What god is as great as our God?

***The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.***

## Introduction

Psalms were a significant part of Temple worship leading up to the second destruction of the Temple in 70 AD (or CE). The Psalms are written in the form (or really forms) of Hebrew poetry. They are poems, although they don't rhyme, either in English or in Hebrew.

The Psalms represent a vast range of emotional states, from peace and security (like Psalm 23) to grief (Psalm 137) to guilt and shame (Psalm 51, traditionally written by David in response to his sin with Bathsheba) to rage (the last verse of 137, which is so awful we can hardly bear to read it, much less embrace it as the word of God.) This Psalm begins with statements of doubt but ends with assurance of faith in God.

One of the features of the Psalms, as well as other forms of Hebrew poetry, has to do with what are called couplets. These are two lines of poetry which say essentially the same thing but in slightly different ways. Couplets are used somewhat in the same way we might use either underlining or bolding to emphasize the importance of this particular part of what we're writing. We'll encounter couplets in a couple of places in the passage we're looking at today, so you'll want to keep in mind what their function is.

## SERMON – Will You Remember?

- A. *(Before v. 1) To the leader: according to Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A Psalm. [The introductions or captions are part of the Hebrew Bible, although the editors' notes are not. In the Hebrew Bible printed in Hebrew, these captions would be counted as verse 1. This caption probably means that that the Psalm is intended to be performed or sung by the leader either on an instrument called the Jeduthun or to a melody called Jeduthun. It further says that this is a psalm (a hymn of worship) written by, or about, or in the style of Asaph. A guild of worship singers in the Temple seems to have been named after Asaph.]*
- B. *(v. 1 & 2) [In this section of the psalm, the mood is one of despair, hopelessness, and rejection. This will be in contrast to the next section we'll look at.] I cried out to God for help, I cried out to God to hear me [This is the first of the couplets I mentioned in the introduction.]*
1. *(v. 2a) When I was in distress I sought the Lord;*
  2. *(v. 2b) at night I stretched out untiring hands,*
  3. *(v. 2c) and I would not be comforted.*

- C. (v. 3–10) In this section, the Psalmist looks back to the relationship with God he had experienced previously, remembering the peace he had experienced. He wonders aloud whether God will spurn God's people (including the psalmist) forever.
- D. (v. 11–13) *[Here, the psalmist has turned a corner. He now has a strategy to restore the peace he had previously known.]* I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. *[And again we have a couplet for emphasis.]*
1. (v. 12) I will consider all your works and meditate on your mighty deeds.
  2. (v. 13) Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God? *[The obvious, although implied, answer is that there is no so-called god as great as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.]*

### **So, what can we take away from this passage this morning?**

First, I want to take a look at the mood the psalmist describes at the beginning of this psalm. I don't think it would be a mistake to say that the early part of the psalm reflects someone who has the blues. And we're all familiar with that, aren't we?

I want to share a brief word with you that I think is an important one. Specifically, I want to draw a distinction between having the occasional blues and experiencing depression. I don't make it a secret that I grapple with depression. I was diagnosed about a dozen years ago. I take medication for depression daily and I see a therapist once every month. And, by God's grace, I function pretty well in the world. One of the reasons I bring this up is that, in our culture as well as our church culture, we tend to treat depression as a dirty little secret. And that's a mistake. I haven't kept it a secret from you that I have an injured foot, and there's no more reason to keep secret from you that I have depression.

So, my dear friends, if you have depression, you don't need to hide it. See a doctor. Take medication if it's prescribed for you. See a therapist, if that's what is best for you. Invite your friends to pray for you. And please, please don't feel that you have to tell people you're fine when you aren't. Please look around this room. Notice all these people. They aren't spectators, and neither are you. All those people are your siblings, your sisters and brothers. Love them and trust them with the truth about how you're doing. I know the road of depression, and if you'd like to talk with me about it, just call me or email me.

Now, back to our text. The psalmist, at the beginning of our text this morning, is moved to crying out in pain to God. He is in duress, he reaches out constantly to God, but experiences no response from God. He cannot be comforted.

We've sometimes been right there, haven't we? Sometimes the cause is the death of someone we love or admire or both. Sometimes the cause is that we watch the news too much because we're immediately aware of catastrophes throughout the entire world. Sometimes the cause is

that we're just tired, so very tired. Sometimes the cause is that we're trying to keep an impossible number of balls in the air at the same time.

And one of the insidious things is that, at times like these, it's easy to come to the conclusion that God simply doesn't care about what you're experiencing. Now, this is a lie, but it's a lie that sometimes is easy to believe.

So, this is a time that I feel that I need to tell you this fundamental truth. It's foundational to every aspect of my pastoral identity and my pastoral ministry. And that truth is this: God loves you. And not only that, God loves you extravagantly. God's love for you shimmers and sparkles and catches the light. I want you to know that truth with every fiber of your being.

In the second part of our passage this morning, as I said before, the psalmist has turned the corner. And what is it that helps him make that turn? As we read in verse 12, the psalmist says, "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago."

So, what might you remember? You might remember the kindness someone showed you. You might remember the time God placed exactly the right person in your path, either to help you or to be helped by you. You might remember a time when you were forgiven for something.

Or you might take a more cosmic approach. You might remember that, before anything else existed, God knew you and called you by name, claiming you for all eternity. You might remember that Jesus gave up glory to be born as a helpless baby, to live on this earth, to die so that all our sin, past, present, and future, is forgiven, and to be raised again in glory.

You might remember the glory of the church. We have had moments of almost inconceivable ugliness, but we've also had moments of transcendent beauty when Holy Spirit has equipped us for selflessness and sacrifice in the name of Jesus.

Friends, do you ever have times of despair, of sadness and hopelessness? Does it ever feel as though God is far away and not listening? If so, remember that you're in good company. You are traveling in the company of this psalmist, who knows exactly how you're feeling. Will you continue to listen to the psalmist? **Will you remember and meditate on the great works God has done? Will you remember that our God is greater, more powerful, and more love-filled than any so-called god? Will you?**

**May it be so. Amen.**

Sermon Art: "Prayer" by Graham Dean

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