

Singing in the Storm

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Preacher: Ben Traynor

[0 : 00] What a joy, what a deep joy and privilege to be here this evening as new members are welcomed,! As you brothers were baptized, it is wonderful for us all. And I know I can speak on behalf of us all! To be here this evening and to see you profess faith in the Lord Jesus. And as we come to our passage this evening, I want to say two things to you. And by virtue of saying it to you new members, I'm saying it to all of us. Firstly this, having confessed Jesus as king, having trusted him to save you from your sin, you have eternal life. Think about those words we heard earlier from John's gospel. Jesus is in the upper room the night before he was crucified. And what did he say? He said, this is eternal life. That they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Dear friends, you confess that. You confess that you know God, that you trusted Jesus and therefore God has given you eternal life. And that eternal life, yes, speaks of the hope of heaven. The hope of heaven and eternity with God. What a glorious thing. But the eternal life that you have in Jesus, that you have in all who know Jesus, isn't just the length of it, but it's the quality of it. Having a relationship restored with the very one who you were made to know. You have life with God, with your maker. What a glorious thing. You have eternal life in Christ and no one can take it from you.

A gift of grace by God. But there is something else I want to tell you, to remind you, that will begin to bring us to Psalm 94. And that is living in this world as a Christian will mean suffering and will mean sorrow. What else did we hear earlier at the end of John 16? The Lord Jesus tells his disciples there in the upper room, and it's true for all his disciples through the ages, that they will have tribulation. And that has been always the case for God's people as we've waited and as we wait for King Jesus to fully and finally establish his rule here on earth. Opposition, suffering, hardship, not only the suffering and trials that come from living in a fallen world, but it is the trials and suffering that come from following Jesus. And as we come to Psalm 94 this evening, we come to a song for God's people, written in a time when they were feeling penned in and suffering at the hands of those who oppose God and those who oppose them. They are in a time of tribulation. Look at how the psalmist describes kind of what's going on. If you have that passage open in front of you, that's going to be really helpful for you. Look at how he describes the scenario of these, of the wicked. Well, in verse 2, he tells us that people are opposing them who are proud. Verse 3, he says there are people exalting in their wickedness. Verse 4, they're hearing boasting about what they're doing. Not only are they doing evil, but there's a kind of bravado about it.

Verse 5, they're crushing God's people. God's people being crushed at the hands of enemies. And that word is the same root word from last week in Psalm 93 of the roaring of waters from last week.

[3 : 45] The chaos and trouble, the roaring of waters has come against God's people. Verse 5 again, they're afflicting God's people. Verse 6, they're murdering and killing the most helpless in the nation, the widow, the fatherless. In verse 20, we see that it's rulers who are doing this, people in places of power and authority. As you skim your eyes down that list at the opening of this psalm, it reads like the kind of front page of a website or newspaper, doesn't it? Which is kind of reporting the kind of worst of human suffering, of human oppression. And it's all being directed at God's people.

And if you like to top it all off in verse 7, that they mock the people and say, the Lord does not see, the God of Jacob doesn't perceive. That they mock God's people. Your God doesn't even see and know anything that's going on. Now, there is some hint, there is some hint, given in verse 7, how they refer to God's people, that this could be rulers within God's own people, perhaps some of the godless and terrible kings that we read of in the Old Testament. But whether we take it that way or take it as the oppression of nations outside of God's people here, the implications and particularly the question the psalm raises is still the same. How do we keep going in times of tribulation? How

do we keep going when we are doing no wrong at all, just faithfully following Jesus?

But it feels like we are in a pressure oven and the heat is being turned up. For some of us here this evening and for our brothers and sisters around the world, this affliction and crushing is something they know very well. There are some amongst us or who have been amongst us that are here because they have had to flee home for fear of their very lives as they have sought to follow Jesus. Perhaps for some of those amongst us, it's not as serious as that, but yet some of you here are still counting the cost for following Jesus. For some of us, it's mocking at school, being excluded from certain groups or friendship groups at school.

Perhaps some of us are experiencing at work. I have heard a few people just in the last number of days talk about the mocking they're receiving for following Jesus at work. For some of us, it's being kind of cut off, alienated, ostracized from family. Or maybe if we take this as the kind of situation that this is happening within God's people, maybe for some of us it's kind of then conflict within the church. And we're just counting the cost of being faithful as perhaps we've been mistreated within a church. And so how do we keep going when the heat is turned up? Or if I can put the question this way, how do we keep singing in the storm? For this is a psalm to be sung, right?

Sung and read and preached in worship, all the things we're just doing now. But how do we keep singing this psalm in the storm? I choose that little phrase storm because last week in Psalm 93, we spoke of the floodwaters lifting up their heads, of lifting their voices and roaring. If you have a Bible in front of you, you can just cast your eyes over that. The floodwaters are roaring. That is chaos and enemies and troubles are coming against God's people. And exactly what we see in Psalm 93, that is all just being worked out now. Chaos, threat, opposition. So how do we keep singing?

[7 : 20] Well, this psalm, I think, gives us three reasons that in the midst of trials and oppressions, we can have confidence in God our King to keep singing. So firstly, firstly, we can have confidence in God our King because he will bring justice, because he will bring justice. The psalm opens there in verse one, doesn't it, with a cry for justice. Oh Lord, God of vengeance, oh God of vengeance, shine forth, rise up, oh judge of the earth, repay to the proud what they deserve.

And through the psalm, in the middle and at the end, we get more cries for justice, and the psalmist seems more assured that it will come. Do you see there in verse 15, for justice will return to the righteous. And by verse 23, right there at the end, he knows it will happen. The psalmist says, he will bring back on them their iniquity and wipe them out. Wipe out these oppressors for their wickedness.

The Lord our God will wipe them out. This psalm is in a group of psalms about God our King, about how God reigns, his kingly rule. And some have asked, well, what's it doing here? It doesn't sort of explicitly mention God as King, which we heard last week in Psalm 93, and we'll get next week in Psalm 95. But this psalm absolutely belongs here because what we're seeing here, if you like, is the application of kingship. What do kings do? What should kings do? They should rule and execute justice on behalf of their people who are being oppressed. And that is what God does. He rules rightly, and we'll see all the enemies of his people defeated. If you've ever read *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, I do feel for those of you that are regular here, you kind of know the things, the books that all I love to read. You get a lot of *Lord of the Rings* and C.S. Lewis.

If you've ever read *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, you'll remember what happens when Aslan, the rightful king of Narnia, returns to Narnia after kind of raising to life again, after dying on the stone table. He goes where? He goes to the witch's palace. And what does he do? He breathes on all those that have been turned to stone, right? He brings them back. He executes justice there, doesn't he? He brings them back. And then he goes off to defeat the witch and her armies.

Dear friends, those of you who know and love the Lord Jesus, in this world, we will have tribulation because we follow Jesus to greater or lesser extent, but we will have it. But we can have confidence that one day Jesus, our king, will come and put an end to all the injustice. He will bring justice.

[10 : 00] And either those who have opposed us or opposed God's people will have justice fall on their heads. They will bear the cost or the cost, the price of their sin and wrongdoing will be paid for because of Christ and what he did on the cross if they had come to him. So in this storm, we can have confidence to sing because a world is coming. A king reigns whose rule is spreading across the earth and will one day return. He will bring a world. Psalm 94 verse 23, where opposition will be no more.

But perhaps as we read that, we begin to have some questions that begin to come to mind. Well, first question, well, does God even see all this, right? Does God see the kind of mocking and suffering and bullying I'm facing at school or university or all the suffering of Christians and believers around the world who are facing persecution like this? Does God even really see that? Particularly when those who are doing these things act as though God doesn't. Well, yes, the psalmist assures us and reminds us that God really does see it. In verse 8, after the psalmist kind of cries to God and laments what's going on. In verse 8, he turns to kind of address his enemies to say, of course, God sees.

Now, this psalm would have been sung in the temple, so it's not likely so much that the enemies are there to hear it, but it's done this way to assure Israel, to assure God's people, God knows what's going on.

Look down there at verse 8. Understand, O dullest of the people's fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, does he not hear? Of course he does. He who formed the eye, does he not see? Of course he does. He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke? Of course he does. He who teaches man knowledge, the Lord knows the thoughts of man, and they are but a breath. From the bully in the school playground who mocks you and excludes you because you follow Jesus, to the boss at work who mocks you and excludes you because you don't work a Sunday or because of the way that you carry yourself at work. From all the way there to emperors and presidents who have persecuted the church, men like Nero of Rome or Xi Jinping of China or Kim Jong-un of North Korea, they are but what the psalmist tells us? They are but a breath. They are but a breath. And God sees and hears and knows all that they do and it will be brought to account. The Lord is a king who has all power and he will bring justice. Remember what we saw in Psalm 93 last week. Yes, the waters roar, but what do we see in response and to all that? In verse 4 and 5, Psalm 93, the Lord is mightier. He's mightier.

Second question, is all this talk of vengeance really necessary and right? I wonder what you thought as we opened Psalm 94 and I read those first few verses. Perhaps even some of us that have been in church a little while just have our spines kind of tingle a little bit. Oh really? Call for vengeance. Verse 23, enemies wiped out. Really? Well yes, the psalmist assures us that is right. Why? Well there's a number of reasons.

[13:19] One would be who wants a king that does not protect his people? Who wants a government that cannot defeat the evil that opposes it? And perhaps if we've never felt a cry for justice, perhaps we've never really been wronged. No, when we're opposed, when we're oppressed and we suffer, we want to know we're on the winning side. We want things to be put right, don't we? Think about what happens with our children, right? Clearly not my children who are sitting over there and listening, right? But think about what happens from the youngest ages, the deepest sense of fairness, right? The words you hear, almost the first words they take on their lips, mummy, daddy, and it's not fair, right? We have it built in us, a deep sense of justice. We want everything to be put right and here is a king who will come and do that. Yes, we want to see justice and therefore if we're struggling to pray this for ourselves, surely this evening we can take it on our lips for persecuted Christians around the world.

For those this evening who are suffering, afraid of their lives, who cannot gather today to worship for fear of their lives. Those imprisoned, we can pray, Lord, speed the day when those enemies are defeated. So between now and the time when Jesus comes and brings full and final justice, just one more point I want to make on this point and that is that Christians never take justice into their own hands. No, that is God's work to do. No, not ours but all we do is we cry to God for justice and as we cry and as we wait for Jesus to come and put the world right, we do what the psalmist does here and we lament, we lament. Do you see there in verse 3, what does the psalmist cry? How long, O Lord? Assured that he will come, assured that it will be put right, we pray, how long, O Lord? We learn to lament and weep for the sin and suffering done against us. I was reading just a couple of weeks ago about a Scottish martyr called Patrick Hamilton just, you know, a few weeks ago. Patrick Hamilton was killed in 1528 in

St Andrews because he followed Jesus, because he was believed he was saved by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. And if you read Patrick Hamilton, some of his final words before he was burnt at the stake, they are full of assurance and confidence in God. I am going to be with Jesus. They are full of praying for enemies. Father, forgive those who put me to the stake, not taking vengeance in his own hands but trusting it to God. But they are also full of lament. How long, O

Lord? Dear friends, we are to lament these things, the brokenness of the world and to ask that the Lord Jesus would come and put it right. So yes, dear friends, have confidence. God is going to bring justice but as you wait for him, cry to him, call to him, lament, mourn the sin in the world, mourn the sin that still clings to my own heart and pray that Jesus would come riding on the clouds. Second, we can have confidence in God the King in times of tribulation and trial for he is always with us. The psalm opens with the cry for justice and this reminder that God sees all and then it now turns sort of away from our enemies to look and fix our eyes on God and his promise. This great promise that he will be with his people. Look there with me at verse 14. The Lord will not forsake his people. He will not abandon his heritage. Dear friends, in times of storms and trials, we can keep singing because the Lord is always with us. He will never leave us.

He will never forsake you. I want you right now to picture yourself right into that place in your life where you feel it hardest to keep following Jesus and to know he is right there with you.

I used to work as a teacher and sometimes you would have children that would have a little run-in with other children in the playground and sometimes when things weren't going so well in the playground you just end up saying, you know what, myself or another member of staff, we'll just come out into the playground today and we'll keep an especially close eye.

[17:50] We will, in other words, be with you. We'll be with you. We'll stand there at a distance and just make sure everything's okay and often it gave the child all the assurance they needed to get back out to the playground. Friends, the Lord Jesus promised in Matthew 28 that after he said all authority in heaven and earth was given to him, he said that he will always be with us to the very end of the age.

Romans chapter 8, we learn that nothing can separate us from the love of God or think of Psalm 23, the shepherd king, I need fear no evil for you are with me, with me. There is no situation, no country, no circumstance, no trial, no storm that a Christian or the church can be in where King Jesus is not right there with us. When we want to give up, we see there in verse 14, he will not give up on us.

And that should give us confidence, confidence to keep going and to keep living God's way in the midst of trial. He is with me, so of course I'll keep living for him. And actually the psalmist begins to pull that out a little bit there in verse 12. Do you see what the psalmist says there?

Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law. Blessed is the man whom you teach out of your law. It's the language of Psalm 1. That's what it's to bring to mind. Blessed, happy is the one who lives God's way and keeps living God's way when the storm hits. I think it's true that when the world oppresses us and turns on us from following Jesus or when we face conflict of some kind. It can be so hard to keep going, so hard. And sometimes we just want to give the easy way out, don't we? And just say forget it and give in to the taunting and temptation. Just let the heat out.

But the psalmist here reminds us, no. Verse 12, happy, blessed is the man who delights in the law of God who loves his word, who loves his way. And as we know from Psalm 1, it's that person that belongs to the assembly of the righteous, not the oppressor, not the wicked one. Patrick Hamilton, who I mentioned earlier, as he went to be burnt at the stake in St. Andrews, many people, and it's true of many Christian martyrs through the ages, but many people taunted him, taunted him to turn from his belief in Jesus, to turn away from Christ and so save himself the stake. Think of the pressure to turn, to recant, to back down or whatever. But he knew Jesus was with him. And he even said, within a few moments, I will be suffering with the king. God did not abandon his heritage. But it doesn't have to just be going to the stake to die, does it? It could be on an oil platform somewhere, on a boat heading out to a rig out of Aberdeen, on a football team, on a building site, in a lecture hall, round a family dining room table. The pressure not to live God's way is real. And when those times come, remember God is with you.

[21:04] And the psalmist tells us, verse 12, blessed is the one knowing who Jesus is with them will keep living God's way, loving his word and living his way. So friends, when opposition comes, keep remembering to live on, to press on the path, the way of righteousness in the Lord Jesus. But there is perhaps something else going on here in the midst of suffering. For you see there in verse 12, it also says, blessed is the man whom you discipline. And I think there's just a hint that in the psalmist view, these sufferings and trials and oppression and tribulation, God is allowing them to grow his faith, grow her faith, refining it like precious metals heated in the fire to rid them of the dross.

And we can see elsewhere in scripture that often that is how God works. That think of Joseph, Joseph, who some of us know for his famous Technicolor dream coats or however many colors it had, right?

But think of Joseph right there at the end of the Joseph narrative. What does he say? They meant all this for evil, but God meant it for good. And so we are trusting God in the midst of these trials to live his way and knowing that he is working this suffering and oppression to drive us closer to Jesus.

And so our prayer is in the midst of the fire, Lord, show me more of you, teach me more of you, that I would know you are with me in the storm. Finally then, and our last point as we finish, God will bring justice. God is with us. And thirdly, God is our help. Verse 17, if the Lord had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence. When I thought my foot slips, your steadfast love, O Lord, it held me up. When the storms come, the Lord is our help.

To say here, I would have lived in the land of silence kind of means like going to the grave, right? Lived in the place of the dead, been totally lost, but you held me up.

[23 : 13] I said earlier about being in the playgrounds and the presence of that teacher that can give a child some assurance in the middle of a difficult time at school. But actually what the psalmist tells us of God with his people kind of goes further than that, right? When I thought my foot slipped, all was lost. What? You held me up. You weren't just going to present beside me or at a distance.

You were right there with me, right close by, holding me up. You were loving me, sustaining me, actively involved in making sure I didn't sink to the very bottom. And so, dear friends, how has the Lord Jesus held you up? For those of us who know and love the Lord Jesus, think back over your own life. How has he held you up? I'm sure there are many ways we can testify to it. One of it perhaps has been the care of God's people. As we saw tonight, and as Joel reminds us, church membership, right?

God working through his people to hold us up and keep us in the midst of trials. So perhaps there are many ways, but let's focus in on this one here. How has Jesus held you up? How has he held his church up? Well, with his love, as the psalmist tells us, with his love. And how has Jesus loved us? Well, he came to this earth and he went to the cross for our salvation. He gave his life to save us, to redeem us from our great enemies. You see, as God's people here on earth, yes, we face oppression and oppressors of tyrants and rulers and atheists who mock God and his people. But we have greater enemies, right? Don't we? Sin and death and hell. And Jesus doesn't just defeat the tyrants. No, he defeats our greater enemies, our greatest enemies, our sin and death and hell. Because of his love, he helped us. He defeated our greatest enemies. And how did he do it? Well, look at verse 21. What does verse 21 say? It says, they band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death. As I was reading this this last week to prepare, that verse just took me straight to the Lord Jesus. Jesus, perfectly righteous, the only one truly righteous, the only one truly innocent. And he was what? Condemned to death for our salvation, that our enemies might be defeated. So for all who are here this evening, who trust Jesus, your great enemies are defeated.

There is a king who has defeated all of them. And as we said at the start, or in other words, as we were hearing from John, that means we have what? Eternal life. Enemies defeated and belong to God.

But dear friends, if you're here this evening and maybe you're visiting for one of the baptisms or new members, or perhaps you've just dropped into Bonacourt here, and you don't know Jesus or you wouldn't say you know Jesus, well welcome, it's wonderful you're here, but death and hell and your sin still stand against you. You are under their power and not safe when the Lord Jesus returns or you die. Well, Jesus is the king of all the world who can defeat those enemies who still stand against you, those greatest enemies that you cannot defeat yourself. But you need him to do it, and he alone can do it. And so come to him this evening, trust him this evening, let him be your savior, bow the knee to him as king, and know all those great enemies defeated. We started, friends, with Jesus in the upper room, and let's end there. Jesus tells his disciples, we will have tribulation. But what did the Lord Jesus tell the disciples after that? What is the psalmist as well trying to do for us this evening? What does Jesus say after that? He says, but take heart,

[27 : 15] I have overcome the world. Dear brothers and sisters, this psalm and the Lord Jesus this evening invites us to take heart when tribulations and trials come, for he has overcome the world. And so may that give us confidence to keep singing in the storm until he returns and there are no

more storms anymore. All is made new, enemies defeated, and we see and enjoy Jesus' reign across the world, world without end, forevermore. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are king of all the world. We thank you one day that you will come and bring perfect justice and righteousness to rule and reign across this earth. But we thank you as we wait for the new heavens and new earth to come and for you to descend riding on the clouds, that you are always with us and that you are our constant help in times of trial. And so we pray for these days as we follow you in times of tribulation. May our confidence and our hope be in King Jesus, knowing that you are with us, you are our help. And may then by your spirit, you help us to trust you and to follow you and to place our hope only and always in Jesus, our King. And we ask it in his name. Amen.