

Confidence from Cradle to Grave

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[0 : 00] What is this psalm doing here? If you're into adventure-style films, big epic trilogies, things like Avengers or Star Wars or Lord of the Rings, perhaps you'll recognize this penultimate scene, the scene before the final scene in the final movie.

The journey is over. The battle has happened. The victory has been won. And before the big celebration at the end, there's often a quiet moment, meaningful glances, significant words shared between the heroes, a deep breath, and a taking stock, and a looking back before the party at the end.

I miss the days when references to the Lord of the Rings were up to date, but for me it doesn't get any better than the end of the last film, the finale.

The ring is destroyed. The world has been saved. The once-hidden king has been crowned. And everyone cheers and shouts and celebrates. And just when you expect it to break out into wild celebration, well, the music dies down, and only one voice is heard, as the king sings this quiet and haunting song, Out of the great sea to middle earth I am come.

In this place will I abide, and my air is unto the ending of the world. And what is the director doing? Pressing pause.

[1 : 45] Reflect. Look back at the terror, the fighting that has passed, that has been brought to an end by the crowning of this king, his coming. And this evening, that is what the book of Psalms is doing.

That's what this psalm is doing here. Perhaps you've noticed, this is the penultimate psalm in book two of the Psalms. Last time we heard about the shame and the suffering of King David in Psalm 69.

If you were to glance at Psalm 70, you would see much the same, clinging to God in desperation. That is how we found God's king. And if you look forward to Psalm 72, even just the heading, you see David's son Solomon, what, crowned, triumphant, victorious, ruling, and reigning.

And in between, Psalm 71. What is that psalm doing? It is pressing pause. Here's something I read this week that really helped me with this psalm.

Christopher Ashe says, near the end of books one and two, an aging believer reflects on the faithfulness of the covenant God to him through all of life and the confidence this gives him in all his troubles.

[3 : 04] Psalm 71 is a pause for reflection. With age comes wisdom, experience, hindsight, something that older believers love to do, isn't it?

To reminisce and share about how God has dealt kindly with them through the very high highs and the lows of this life. And the psalmist tonight is doing that for us, reflecting on his own life in light of the past suffering of God's king and the future glory of God's king that is coming.

You'll notice we're not told in the heading who this is a psalm of, but if you were to look at the end of Psalm 72, verse 20, there's a suggestion that it could still be the king speaking.

The end of book two, this concludes the prayers of David, the son of Jesse. So it could still be the king singing in Psalm 71, or since we're not told, it could be an ordinary believer singing in the voice of the king, using his language, his style, his voice to reflect on God's covenant faithfulness to all believers through God's covenant king.

And I'm going to assume that that's what is happening here. This is who's speaking, an ordinary believer. But in the end, the lesson for us is the same, which is that in light of God's devotion to his suffering yet glorious king, we everyday ordinary Christians can have lifelong confidence in him and his rescue.

[4 : 44] So we're going to see firstly in the Psalm, the Psalmist can reflect on a lifelong Lord, and then I hope we can spend some time learning some lifelong lessons from him.

Firstly, let's see the Psalmist God is a lifelong Lord. Psalm begins with familiar thoughts, doesn't it, in the book of Psalms.

And you, Lord, I've taken refuge. Let me never be put to shame in your righteousness. Rescue me and deliver me. Turn your ear to me and save me. We've heard before, haven't we, that our God is a refuge.

He is a rock, a fortress, a place of protection and safety and salvation. See those prayers, Luke? Rescue me, deliver me, save me. This is what it means for a person to take refuge in the Lord, for God to save them.

And I wonder if you are saved tonight, if that is how you picture your salvation. It's such a powerful, compelling picture, isn't it, of our relationship to God if our trust is in Christ, that he becomes to us a place of unbreakable safety from our enemies, from our sin, our coming death, the devil, that those great enemies have no power over us when we are hiding in the Lord, when he is our refuge.

[6 : 16] You think of being inside when the rain is lashing at the window and the wind is howling at the door. When we are in a wind-and-water-tight home, we don't feel threatened by those things, do we?

You're somehow looking out the window, seeing the storm raging outside can make us feel even more safe, knowing that we are safe inside. Growing up, we went camping every year.

We went camping around the UK. That meant that it rained every summer. And somehow lying in a warm, dry tent at night with the rain drumming on the ceiling of the tent and the wind buffeting it made you feel even more comfortable, comforted, secure, safe.

And friends, that is who the Lord is for us tonight, a refuge, verse 3, to which I can always go, a constant place of safety, security from our great enemies.

God invites us to go and live in his protection. Abide in me, said Jesus. Come and make your home in me. Step out of the power of sin, death, and Satan.

[7 : 29] Come and live in me. Now, we hear that often in the Psalms. What makes this Psalm special is that the Psalmist isn't just repeating an idea. He's actually quoting nearly word for word from another Psalm, from Psalm 31.

You don't have to turn there. Let me just read you the first few lines and follow along, okay, in Psalm 71. Psalm 31. In you, Lord, I've taken refuge.

Let me never be put to shame. Deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me. Come quickly to my rescue. Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

It's actually even closer in the Hebrew. It's as if the Psalmist has heard or read these words before, but now he can take them as his own. And what's significant about that is that Psalm 31 is a Psalm of David.

And so whoever is writing Psalm 71, what's he doing? He is praying along with God's King. He is taking the words, the prayers, the desires of God's King as his own.

[8 : 39] He is praying in light of the protection and the provision that God has made for his King in the past. He's coming to God. He's identifying with God's King in his suffering, in his rejection.

We would say later, he is identifying with God's King in his death and resurrection. Just listen to this confidence in verse 20. Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again.

How from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up? How can he say that so confidently? Because he knows that God has saved his King from death.

Not yet by having raised him from the dead as he would do in Christ, but by sparing his King from death at the hands of his enemies. And so this ordinary believer, we don't know who, this person can take heart that in the thickest of the thick of life, even in the face of death, that this God, his God will save him because so he has done for his King.

And brothers and sisters, that is all the more real, all the more true and certain for us tonight. Do we have confidence to come to God, to pray this prayer, to trust in God as our saving refuge?

[10 : 11] Well, just think, our King, the Lord Jesus, what has he done? He has canceled the charges that lay against us, nailing the record of our sin to the cross.

He has overthrown the spiritual forces of darkness, triumphing over them by his death. Death could not hold him and he has overcome it, being raised to life again.

He lives, he reigns for us tonight. God has saved his King and by his rescue, he saves us.

Surely for us tonight, friends, in the light of God's faithful love in dealing with our King, Jesus Christ, we can pray, can't we? Verse three, be my rock of refuge. Be my rock of refuge to which I can always go.

And that's a confidence that he has, not only when death is a distant thought, but all his life long, Luke. He says, this God, the Lord, he has been his Lord, he is his lifelong Lord.

[11 : 18] Look at verse five with me. For ye have been my hope, sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth. From my birth, I've relied on you.

You've brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you. Verse nine, do not cast me away when I'm old. Don't forsake me when my strength is gone. This is a confidence, Luke, that holds us from the cradle to the grave.

This psalmist, he can look back on the trustworthiness, the reliability of the Lord, even from before he knew he was relying on him. Before he was born, he says, I was safe in your hands.

And he can look at this day in his calendar today and say, I still praise you. I will ever praise you. And he can look forward, can't he? And trust in the Lord to keep him safe into the uncertainty, the difficulty of old age.

That is what he is doing, isn't it? The beginning and the end of life and everything in between. You are a faithful God. And his point is, friends, that God is not a refuge for us at one time or one age or one stage of life.

[12 : 36] Some people only want God involved in their lives three times. A baptism, a wedding, and a funeral. When they're born, when they get married, when they die.

The psalmist is saying that God is not like that. That is not who God is. He is a lifelong Lord. To know this God really, personally, to be saved by him is for him to be your God at all times.

To know that he has held you from before you were born, to trust that he will not let you go to the day of your death. We sang earlier, didn't we, that the wonderful truth that God knitted us together in the darkness.

Our cells, our tissues, our organs, and all the days that I should live which you ordained for me were written in your book, O Lord, before they came to be.

What wonderful love that is. Paul speaks in the New Testament of God who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace.

[13 : 45] And even if you don't yet trust in the Lord, if you don't know him for yourself, just think, here is one who has known you, who has given you life, who sustained you from your first, first days in this world.

The God who gave you life, who brought you forth from the womb. And the psalmist is saying tonight, take it from me, that as surely as you could rely on him then, that is as surely as you can rely on him now.

Some of you will know what it is to have God as your hope and your confidence from your youth. Perhaps you've never known a day when you didn't know and trust and love the Lord.

Well, treasure that. Treasure that with the psalmist. What a precious testimony that is to his grace and faithfulness over those years that whatever you've been through, you are here tonight to praise him still.

And for some of you, those have been long years. And for some of you, lots of years. Well, take heart, brothers and sisters, in the love and the care of our God through those years to bring you here, still praising him.

[15 : 04] Look back. Treasure what he has done for you. Perhaps that you look back at years when you haven't known and loved the Lord. Years that you perhaps regret.

But knowing him now, can't you look back also and see his love and care and kindness to you through all those years that you did not know him?

in your very existence and birth and his protecting you, guiding you, holding you back from what was evil, pointing you to the good and showing you the wrong in you and bringing you to hear the good news of Jesus and giving you a new heart to believe it.

Friends, knowing him now, can you not look back and see his faithfulness to you through all those lost years to bring you to this point? The psalmist is reflecting, isn't he, on God's lifelong faithfulness and grace and if you are a Christian tonight, you can do that too because here is our confidence from cradle to grave that our God is a trustworthy Savior because he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and as he was with Christ from his first to his last days and now forever, as he heard Christ, as he upheld Christ, as he saved Christ in his resurrection, so in Christ he is with us, he hears us, he upholds us, he saves us, he is our lifelong Lord.

And as we reflect on that truth, the psalmist teaches us three lifelong lessons for us to take away tonight. Firstly, that God is our constant hope.

[17 : 01] Now, one way we can sometimes tell what it is that God wants to teach us out of a passage of the Bible is by looking for words and phrases and ideas that are repeated and this psalm is a great example of that.

Just glance at verse 5, you have been my hope, sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth. And then verse 14, look, as for me, I shall always have hope.

What does he want us to learn? We can hope in the Lord constantly. Now, sometimes we think of hoping as sort of wishing or guessing, don't we, about what we can't know.

But clearly, this is different because he's saying all his lifelong, whatever he's been through, his hope in God has never let him down. So, a better definition of hope than in God is a joyful expectation for the future based on true events in the past which changes everything about my present.

Perhaps you remember that from when we did Hope Explored. He is saying Christian hope is better than a wish. It is settled confidence about what God is going to do for us based on what he has already done for us.

[18 : 18] And what God promises he will do, that is what the psalmist puts his hope in, isn't it, Luke? Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again.

From the depths of the earth, you will bring me up. What is he hoping in? It is resurrection hope. And we do have that hope all the more firmly today, don't we?

If our trust is in our risen Lord Jesus Christ, so that whatever troubles we go through, however bitter, however sore those troubles might be, we have this constant hope that God will restore our lives, that he will take away our sadness and all causes of sadness, that he will take away our sin and all causes of sin because he has raised our King Jesus from the dead and so he will raise us from the dead in glory.

And that hope, brothers and sisters, is hope that does not fail us or let us down. There's a constant hope through all ages and stages of life that sustains us to the end.

The psalmist says he has this hope from his youth. If you are in your teens, your 20s, your 30s, if you would say you were young, would you say that this is your constant hope?

[19 : 47] There's lots of things I imagine that you hope for. A career, independence, marriage, family, children, other things perhaps.

it's easy to forget when you're young, isn't it, that the only thing you can hope for with any certainty is your resurrection. God has not promised you personally the life that you've always wanted and some of the trouble that you see might even be those things not working out and hopes that you have failing.

But he gives you this constant hope to see you through the disappointment and sadness and losses of life because when our hope is in God and in the Lord Jesus, he promises to restore us completely, to raise us with him from the dead on the last day, to live with him forever in a world made new.

That is the psalmist's confidence, isn't it? He looks back on a life of suffering, but he trusts in God to honor and comfort, restore, and redeem him by raising him from the dead.

Did you know that of all the things you hope for in life, that is the most certain thing, that God will raise you more certain than a job or money or marriage, a home, family, because God, it not only promises a resurrection, he has done it in the Lord Jesus, and so if your hope is in him, he will do it for you too.

[21 : 25] And he's looking back on this, isn't he, when he's much older. This is not a young man writing the psalm, and some of you tonight are on that end of the spectrum. If you were to think of yourself as older, perhaps you know the difficulty, the uncertainty that old age brings.

Well, let the psalmist reassure you tonight that this hope is still as real and sure for you as it ever was, and that as you look back on the life, the years behind you and all the years that you have lived, that you still have as much to look forward to as you have ever truly had, because our hope in God is all that we have ever truly had in a world of uncertainty.

Brothers and sisters, let the difficulty, the uncertainty, the aches and pains, the sadness, the losses of old age sharpen your hope in the resurrection, because as Paul tells us, our present sufferings do not withstand comparison with the eternal weight of glory that is to come.

From cradle to grave, friends, our lifelong Lord is our constant hope, and so second lesson, he deserves our continuous praise. Again, look at those repeated words.

It's even more this time. I will ever praise you, verse six. I will praise you more and more, verse 14. Then towards the end, I will praise you with the harp, sing praise to you with the lyre, shout for joy when I sing praise to you.

[23 : 06] Do we get the picture? Praise, praise, praise to God. He deserves our continuous praise. It's an idea captured perfectly in Psalm 63, because your love is better than life.

I will praise you as long as I live. Your life lived under the perfect love of this Lord must be a life of praise. Now, there's lots, isn't there, that could flow out of this guy's mouth and his heart, all the troubles that he has seen, the bitterness that he has gone through.

But instead, it is praise to the Lord who saves him. How can he praise God when he is surrounded by threats and enemies on every side?

I was speaking to someone this week, and one of the things that we talked about was that it's impossible for us to get rid of worry or fear or anxiety and not replace it with something.

Your hearts are always occupied. Our minds are never really empty. So rather than trying hard not to feel worried, we talked about exchanging the worry for worship.

[24 : 18] That instead of having whatever trouble overpower, control our hearts and fill us with worry, we can instead turn to the Lord as our refuge, a place of safety, and know his righteous rule over us.

We can, remember, turn our hearts to his powerful, loving rescue and care for us in Jesus and say with the psalmist, your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens.

You who've done great things, who is like you, God? Stand in awe of him. Call to mind all that he has done. Worship him. Now that doesn't mean that we won't ever feel worried or scared or anxious, but we know what to do, where to go, when we do feel like that.

Because this God is our lifelong Lord. There is nothing that he cannot keep us safe from. And so the right response of our hearts is continuous praise to him.

In all times, we don't always feel like praising God, do we? When we feel stressed, overwhelmed, anxious. But that is not because he's not bigger than those things.

[25 : 32] It is because we have lost sight of who he really is in those things and have not come to him to hide in him from those things.

Whatever it is, illness, exams, finance, work, relationships, even death. Friends, God is a refuge for us and those things therefore do not need to control our hearts.

let the Lord be the refuge of our hearts and we will praise him continuously in the highs and the lows. And finally, with our praise comes proclamation.

Him we confidently proclaim. Again, this is one of the big take-home lessons of the psalm, isn't it? Verse 16, I will come and proclaim your mighty act, sovereign Lord.

I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone. What's the difference? Well, praise is directed upwards to God, proclamation outwards to others.

[26 : 39] Perhaps the most striking statement of that comes in verse 18, look, even when I'm old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.

Because he is our lifelong Lord, our proclamation isn't finished till our dying day. And in telling the next generation what is he doing, he's renewing the cycle, starting over, so that those who are yet to be born would know this God from their earliest days to be their lifelong Lord and Savior.

And it's a really significant way, isn't it, to come to the end of book two of Psalms. We've seen that this book focuses and centers on the communication of who God is to all around.

And in this final pause, this final reflection before the celebration, while this elderly saint is still compelled to communicate to others who his God is, it's a reminder, isn't it, that one of the most significant things that we can do as a church is proclaim Christ to those younger than ourselves, to our children, to generations yet to come.

I spoke a moment ago about the hope that older believers have, but here is a privileged responsibility of elderly saints also to be witnesses to the next generation of believers.

[28 : 12] Week by week, Sunday by Sunday, do you know what a blessing and a witness it is to your church family to worship with ye? seeing a seasoned faith, a faith seasoned by years of Christian living.

We need your maturity, your steadfastness. If you are older, you might not think that you come to church to serve, but you serve those younger than you by worshipping with us and speaking with us and sharing your faith with us.

Sometimes you hear churches complain, don't you, that there aren't any young people and that can be a problem for churches, but imagine a church where there are no old people and what an impoverished church that would be.

And so, if you are young, don't separate yourself from other, older Christians. It's a temptation, I think, perhaps especially for students, but not exclusively, to be doing things with people like you, the same age with you, and there's benefit in that, but here's the lesson, don't only do things with people like you and of the same age and stage at V.

If you are a student, don't only go to Guys and Girls Bible Study, be part of your life group with believers throughout the church body. You don't only speak with each other after a service, speak to older Christians who can witness to you, speak to you, share with you.

[29 : 52] This is the most intergenerational church I know. If you were to think of a family gathering with newborns and great-grandparents and mums and dads and children, brothers and sisters together, what a wonderful thing that would be.

This is our family, and we have a gathering like that twice a week every week. So rejoice in that, enjoy that, make the most of that, celebrate as a family, learn from older Christians because he is not only a lifelong Lord, our God is a God of every generation.

And so, brothers and sisters, tonight let us hope in him and praise him and proclaim him, whoever we are, with our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. God, our Father, how we thank you for your faithfulness, your grace towards us.

Thank you for bringing us together into your family. Father, Father, how we thank you for the witness of others to us. Lord, over the years, Father, we thank you for the joy of looking back to your faithfulness in the past, not least and supremely in the death and the resurrection of Christ for our salvation.

[31 : 31] Lord, how we pray that you would fix our hope on that day when he will return to raise us to new life, in new bodies, in a new world.

Father, root our hope, we pray, in Christ. Let us look forward to that and point one another to him. Let us do that now, we pray, as we share in communion together, proclaiming his death until he comes.

Lord, build our faith, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.