

Gladness in My Heart

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Date: 28 December 2008

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- [0 : 0 0] Please be seated. In April 1831, Charles Simeon was 71 years old and had been the pastor of Trinity Anglican Church in Cambridge for 49 years.
- Paul's a baby in that respect. The majority of that ministry, 49 years, took place in the midst of the most scathing, degrading persecution and opposition.
- And the majority of that persecution came from within his own congregation. He said at the time that he, as far as he knew, he was the only evangelical Christian in Cambridge at that time.
- And he started getting some of the students from Cambridge to come around for Bible studies and they, anyone who turned up to his Bible study, was degraded and oppressed and persecuted. They were called sims derogatory for going and hearing about the Bible from Charles Simeon.
- The church wardens, for the first 12 years, he was the pastor of the church. The church wardens locked the pews. You know, they used to have those little doors in the pews. They locked them. So he preached to people in the aisle.
- [1 : 2 3] He started putting out chairs and things that he bought out of his own expense so that people could hear him preach and they threw them out into the courtyard. One afternoon he was asked by his friend, he had a friend, named Joseph Gurney, how he had surmounted persecution and outlasted all the great prejudice against him in his 49 year ministry.
- He said to Gurney, My dear brother, we must not mind a little suffering for Christ's sake. When I am getting through a hedge, if my head and shoulders are safely through, I can bear the pricking of my legs.
- Let us rejoice in the remembrance that our holy head has surmounted all his sufferings and triumphed over death. Let us follow him patiently.
- We shall soon be partakers of his victory. As I read this psalm and reflect on it, it makes me think about the quiet confidence of so many Christian saints who have gone before us, who have endured persecution and oppression and all manner of suffering for the sake of Christ.
- And so I decided to title this sermon, Christian Confidence in Troubling Times. Christian Confidence in Troubling Times.
- [2 : 5 3] Because this psalm has so much to teach us about how to handle suffering and persecution while glorifying God without ignoring or discounting the lamentable situation that we find ourselves in.
- Confidence in God, sweet, quiet confidence in a sovereign God who loves us without ignoring the obvious distress that we find ourselves in.
- So I want to pray for us that God would teach us and encourage us this morning from this word. Let's pray. Father, we do ask that you would come now and encourage us.

We thank you for the book of Psalms, for the chance to spend some time in the Psalms over the next few weeks. We thank you, most of all, I thank you for the honesty of the Psalms.

Lord, we see psalms of lament and psalms of distress. I pray that they would encourage us to be honest with you in times of distress, but also to have great confidence in Jesus Christ who suffered, who was tempted, who overcame all and who will raise us with him in the last day.

[4 : 10] In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. The context of this psalm is that it's a psalm of individual distress. The psalmist is expressing his distress.

He's in a stressful situation. And the situation is that there are wealthy worshippers of other gods who are continually oppressing him, persecuting him, falsely accusing him, belittling his God, all because he worships the one true God, Yahweh, all because he wants to be obedient to God, all because he wants to be a faithful disciple, you might say.

So let's take a look at it. Verse 1. We're just going to go through verse by verse. Be good to have your Bibles open. Verse 1 says, Answer me when I call, O God of my right.

You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. Like I said, he's being oppressed. He's being persecuted.

And so, in the midst of that, he both recalls a confidence-inspiring instance where God delivered him, but that sandwiched between two distressful cries to God, pleas to God.

[5 : 41] I wonder if you've ever been in a situation where you've been persecuted for being a Christian. Maybe at work you like to speak out about your faith on certain ethical issues. Maybe you evangelise people at work.

Maybe they catch you out reading your Bible. Maybe this happens for some of you at school. Friends, so-called friends who are supposed to support you, make fun of you because of your faith.

I wonder how you react in those moments. Well, the psalmist reacts by, on the one hand, calling out to God, saying he's distressed, he needs help, but also remembering the time in which God has delivered him in the past.

See, he doesn't deny the situation he's in, does he? It's easy in these moments to go into one of two areas. That is, to ignore the suffering, to put on a happy face.

That's wrong. And also, to react violently against your oppressors. He doesn't either. He has quiet confidence in the sovereign care of God.

[6 : 50] So, in the first instance, he says, I imagine he yells, he says, answer me when I call, O God of my right. I'm stressing out here.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. And in the midst of those two petitions, he says, you gave me room when I was in distress.

Or, literally, in the original, it's kind of a play on words. He says, in a tight space, you made room for me. When I was in a tight space, you made the area wide for me.

You relieved me, other translations say. He doesn't deny the situation he's in. He does call out to God in the midst of his stress. But he remembers when God has delivered him in the past.

He remembers that God is a gracious God who makes promises. Guys, we've got to cultivate this kind of attitude when we're in the midst of suffering and when we're in good times as well.

[7 : 57] See, it's easy when you're in a good time just come off Christmas. Things are going well, maybe. It's easy from a pulpit here to say, God is sovereign.

God loves us. God does the best thing for us. Romans 8, 28. God works all things together for the good of those who love him, are called according to his purpose. Praise the Lord. It's easy to say that when times are good.

But what about when you're in the midst of suffering, when the screws are being tightened? Can you say that then? This is the model for us, I think. God wants us to cry out to him in our distress.

He doesn't want us to ignore it. Some Christians will tell you, you know, you've just got to put on a happy face. Read Lamentations.

There's room for us to lament and cry out to God. But in the midst of crying out to God, we need to remember that he's a sovereign God who gives us grace and that's what the psalmist does here.

[9 : 04] Why is he confident to call on God? I mean, God's helped him in the past, but how does that guarantee that he's going to do it in the future? The people who are oppressing him, people who are persecuting him, they worship gods who are capricious and petulant and arbitrary and so they don't know that God's going to bless them.

Why does this guy who worships Yahweh, why is he so confident? Let's look at verse 2 and 3. He says, how long, turning to his oppressors to speak to them, he says, how long you people shall my honour suffer shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself. The Lord hears when I call on him.

He's turned to his persecutors and he says, how long will you people cause my name to suffer shame? How long will you falsely accuse me?

He's sick of it. He's had enough. They've been oppressing him. They've been persecuting him. And he wants them to stop. Give it a rest, he's trying to tell them. It's stressing him out.

[10 : 24] It's getting him down. Then he says some really amazing words to them. He says, but know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself.

The Lord hears when I call on him. He says, he wants them to know they're ignorant. They don't know about God.

They don't love Yahweh. He wants them to know who God is. This is a really good model for us when we're being persecuted.

As I said, we can fall into two errors. We can just passively let the words wash over us and let God be belittled, pretend it's not happening to us.

And that's wrong. Or we can violently react and punch a guy out or, you know, throw back violent words against that person.

[11 : 23] Both of those are sinful errors. He wants them to know who God is. And so should we.

We should want to correct their ignorance so that they might come to know Jesus and trust in him. He gives two reasons for his confidence in the midst of persecution.

You can see it. Number one, God has set apart his people who have faith in him. Look at verse three.

But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself. He knows that God has, if you're a Christian, he's drawn you to himself. He's set you apart. That's like making you holy. He's taken you out of a world of sin and made you a child of his.

You're a sheep of his pasture. He's set you apart. It means you can have confidence in God in the midst of suffering. Secondly, God always hears the prayers of those who trust him.

[12 : 30] The Lord hears when I call on him. God always hears our prayer. He's a loving God.

He's a heavenly father. He's a shepherd. He hears your prayer and he always answers the prayer. It's always going to be yes, no or later. He always hears the prayers of those who love him.

Jesus modeled this for us. I spoke about this at the 6 p.m. the other night. He's in the garden of Gethsemane, remember? He's about to be betrayed and killed and have God's wrath poured out upon him on the cross.

God's wrath. He comes to his father in prayer and because he knows that his father is a loving God who wants the best for him and who works everything according to a perfect plan, he says to God, I don't want to do this.

I don't want to die. I don't want to be separated from you. I don't want the pain. I don't want the suffering or the separation, but not what I will, but what you will.

[13 : 38] Not my will, but yours be done. That's a prayer like the psalmist's prayer of someone who trusts in a loving God, a sovereign God, a God who has a plan and a purpose for our lives.

That's the way we should pray when we're in the midst of suffering and Jesus was in the midst of the most acute suffering that anyone has ever felt in the history of the world. I get to see this, telling the story, I get to see this when I visit some of the older people of this church.

You know, the kind of people who have gone through immense suffering, they've gone through wars and depression and death of a loved one, cancer, debilitating diseases.

They're the kind of people you want to hang around with. Because they're the kind of people who have cultivated by God's grace, built up the kind of trust in God that says prayers like these, that cries out to God like this in the midst of trial and temptation and suffering.

people. You need to get around you some of those people. It's a beautiful thing to see faith like that and we've got it among people in this church and you should pray that God would make you that kind of person.

[15 : 08] Let's look at verse 4-5. He says, when you are disturbed, do not sin. Ponder it on your beds and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.

These verses can be interpreted in two ways, both beneficial. On the one hand, he might be saying this to his enemies. So he says, my enemies, when you are disturbed, when you are angry with me, when you are persecuting Christians, do not sin.

Instead, ponder it on your beds and be silent. Offer the right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. Again, he is appealing to them, don't be like that.

Don't be ignorant of God's blessing. Instead, put your trust in him. It is a great thing for us to tell our enemies. New Testament teaches us that we should be that way toward enemies because either they will become Christians or in effect, you will be heaping burning coals on their head because you want their blessing even when they want a curse for you.

So he could be saying that to his enemies. In your anger, do not sin. Ponder God, put your trust in him. Or he could be saying this to fellow believers who are suffering as well.

[16 : 28] So he could be saying, brothers and sisters, when you are persecuted, don't retaliate in a sinful way, but trust in God, have quiet confidence in the God who hears your prayers.

It's a good word for us. I'm not just talking about when you're persecuted for your faith because maybe you're not persecuted much. Although Paul says to Timothy that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Something to pray about. Either way, whether it's suffering for persecution or general suffering because you've got a disease or you've got no money in the bank or you've got family issues, that's a good word for us.

When you're persecuted, do not retaliate in a sinful way. In your anger, do not sin. Anger isn't a sinful emotion necessarily.

Some Christians think that anger is sinful. It's not a Christian emotion. God is angry a lot of the time in the Bible. I was talking to Ron Longbottom before the service.

[17 : 36] And he was talking to me about the issue in Zimbabwe and various parts of the world where people are being oppressed, women and children are being raped, people are being kicked out of their homes and out of the country.

And he was angry about it. And that's good. If you see women getting raped and the poor being oppressed and you don't get angry, then you're a psychopath. God gets angry at sin.

And so what he's saying here is when you get angry, when people persecute you, or when you're being oppressed, don't sin in that anger. That is, you need to respond in the right way.

Like I said, don't punch the guy. That would be a good tip. At the same time, don't do nothing. He says you ought to take a lie down, have a cup of tea on your bed, be silent, offer the right sacrifices.

I think that means live in a righteous way, be a good disciple, and put your trust in God. God says to people who are suffering, vengeance is mine.

[18 : 53] He's angry about it and vengeance is going to be his. He's going to deal out justice on the last day. In the meantime, put your trust in the Lord. Let's look at verse 6 to 7 to finish.

He says, There are many who say, Oh, that we might see some good. Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord. You have put goodness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound.

He finishes with a really beautiful and important truth for us. That is, according to verse 7, your happiness in God, your trust in God, your relationship with God isn't dependent on whether you have a large bank balance, whether you're healthy, whether you're wealthy, whether you're prospering in every area of your life.

See, his oppressors had grain and wine abounding. They were wealthy. And so it looked to some people like, they were being blessed by God and this man in his distress had been abandoned by God.

He flips that on its head as Job does in the Bible, as many books do in the Bible. God confirms the fact that we need to hear that his blessing isn't contingent on our material prosperity, on our health and wealth.

[20 : 20] There are many churches around us and across the world and these churches are going, taking off in really poor areas. Makes me angry.

Makes God angry. These churches preach that if you become a Christian, you'll become wealthy. If you become a Christian, you'll have good health. You won't have miscarriages anymore. Your flocks will be blessed.

You know, you'll get the toys that you want, the house extension. These churches are taking off all over the world and they're satanic.

Jesus suffered. Jesus was homeless. Jesus was poor. He tells his disciples to take up their cross and deny themselves.

And the psalmist says, you have put gladness in my heart more than when their wine and their grain abounded. His gladness, his joy in God isn't contingent on his material blessing.

[21 : 30] I know at Christmas, a lot of people get really depressed. It's not the picture we see on the TV commercials. A lot of people get really down and sometimes it's because they don't have money to afford presents.

Sometimes it's because they don't have family around them. Sometimes it just reminds them how lonely they are. Your happiness as a Christian, your joy in God cannot and should not be contingent on your material blessings or your material situation, your health, wealth and prosperity.

I'm going to finish now. I'm going to finish with Simeon, Charles Simeon. This is a great man for us to follow. His perseverance was incredible.

Just incredible. If you can get a book on him, be sure that you do. He was speaking as I have been about the rich, sweet blessings that come from being close to Jesus in the midst of suffering.

See, we're in an even better position with Simeon and all other believers since the cross, even better position than the psalmist because we can see in hindsight that God not only stays close to us when we're suffering but that God himself has suffered on the cross.

[22 : 55] That God himself embraced suffering and triumphed. That God himself embraced the cup of God's wrath and stayed faithful to his Father.

So we've got a great example in Jesus and we've got a great friend in Jesus and we've got a close mediator in Jesus. We've got a perfect sacrifice in Jesus and so he speaks Simeon says this about how to persevere in suffering and oppression and persecution because we're close to Jesus.

He said, with this sweet hope of the ultimate acceptance of God I have always enjoyed much cheerfulness before the men who persecute me.

For if we persevere in humble discipleship we shall feel the presence of God we shall experience his love we shall live in the enjoyment of his favour and in the hope of his glory.

You often feel that your prayers scarcely reach the ceiling in the midst of trial. but oh get into this humble spirit by considering how good the Lord is and then prayer will mount on wings of faith to heaven.

[24 : 18] The sigh the groan of a broken heart will soon go through the ceiling up to heaven I into the very presence of God. let me pray for us.

Father thanks again for your encouragement to us through your word. We thank you for the example of the psalmist from Psalm 4 who trusted in your promises in the midst of suffering.

Lord many of us here are enduring great suffering and so I pray for them that you would remind them now that you are a God who makes promises that you are a God who keeps promises that you work all things for the good of those who love you and are called according to your purpose.

Thank you that you have a purpose for us that even if it includes suffering that you will keep us and persevere us to the day when you return and take us with you to be with you where there's no more crying no more pain no more persecution no more suffering.

We pray this in Jesus name.