

Our burden bearer

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Date: 24 January 2016

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[0 : 00] are you burdened in your life today? Are there burdens that you are carrying?

Some that you're very conscious of, that are very much before you, a heavy burden that you're carrying.

And as you carry those burdens, whatever they might be, are you struggling? Is it difficult? Is it something that you feel is beyond your capacity to carry because of the weight of any given burden or maybe because of the number of burdens that are weighing in on you and just the complication of so many matters that seem to have come together and you're struggling to remain standing in the face of them?

I could give or try and give a number of examples of the kind of burdens that people have to carry, that you might be carrying. But I'm not going to do that.

I don't know what your particular burden or burdens may be. You do, but I don't. But whatever they are, whatever stress or grief or pain or exhaustion or frustration your burden brings to you, I do have good news for you.

[1 : 36] And the good news is that we, as God's people, have a burden bearer. The verse that we will hone in on and focus our attention on identifies the one who bears our burdens.

The psalmist, identified as David, as he recalls God's saving work, rescuing his people from captivity in Egypt, and as he presents it in poetic form, in the midst of his historical recounting of the tale, he erupts in praise as he is struck by this reality that his God, our God, is a burden-bearing God.

Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Now that verse, all by itself, in glorious isolation, if we were to read it in glorious isolation, is a beautiful verse, the kind of verse you could put on a poster, maybe have it up in your sitting room.

Or as a screensaver on your computer without any knowledge of what went before or what follows it in the psalm in question. By itself, it brings comfort to us.

It is a truth that stands alone. That said, it is found in a particular psalm and in a particular context. And so as we think about the truth that it contains, we will do so in some measure in the light of the occasion in which David expresses this truth, and also in the light of the manner in which Paul makes reference to the immediately preceding verse, and see how that also sheds some light on the truth contained in this verse.

[3 : 37] Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Well, let's think then about our burden bearer and consider some realities concerning our burden bearer.

The first thing we want to notice, and we can do this very swiftly because the verse is so clear in this regard, and that's simply to notice the identity of our burden bearer.

Who is the one who is willing and able to carry, to bear our burdens? Well, we read there in verse 19, praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.

The one who is able and willing to bear our burdens is the Lord. Our covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. The one who bears our burdens is, in the language of the psalmist, God our Savior.

The God who has reached down to save us, to save us from the fearful pit and from the miry clay. He is our burden-bearer. And that reality alone, that this language would be employed to destroy the almighty Creator God, that he is a burden-bearer, is in itself a remarkable thing.

[5 : 03] When we think of that task of bearing burdens, ordinarily that task is given to those who would be considered the lowest of the low.

Indeed, we think of beasts of burden. And what's a beast of burden? Not a very important beast. Yes, a task that's important, but hardly a role of great dignity.

And yet, the one who bears our burdens is none other than the Lord God Almighty, the Lord God our Savior. He is the one who presents himself, who identifies himself, who offers himself as our burden-bearer.

But even as we ponder on the remarkable reality of that, we're left thinking, well, why is that so? Why is it that God is willing to be our burden-bearer?

Why is it that God offers himself to the likes of us to be our burden-bearer? And the only answer that we can come to in answer to that question is the love that he bears towards us.

[6 : 13] This is the question really of motivation. Why would he do this for us? Has God not got more important matters to attend to than bearing your burdens?

Why would he do so? Well, it's because of his fatherly, his parental love for us. As I was thinking about this theme of God carrying our burdens, I was struck by the beautiful language that we find in Isaiah chapter 46.

Now, in dealing with this verse, we could, of course, do so without reference to passages such as these, but it is such a beautiful passage that I really wanted to read it out and to share with you the language here that speaks of God's motivation in bearing us up and in bearing our burdens.

Why he does it. In Isaiah chapter 46 and verses 3 and 4, we read, God is speaking to his people and he says, Why do I do this?

Well, because I made you, because I conceived you, because I bore you, because I love you, because my love for you is paternal love. It's parental love.

[8 : 01] The language here really is of maternal love. The love of a mother, the love of a father, combined in the love of God for his people. This is the motivation that lies behind his burden bearing for us.

But returning to our passage, let's just notice in these few words of the psalmist, something of the nature of his burden bearing.

Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. The word that stands out there, and I trust is of great encouragement to you, is that his burden bearing is permanent.

He daily bears our burdens. The language that David uses here to get across this notion, this reality of his daily care, his daily concern, his daily burden bearing, is simply the repetition of the word day. Day, day, he bears our burdens. Day by day, every day, all day, 24-7, is the burden bearing ministry activity of God on our behalf.

[9 : 22] He is the one who daily bears our burdens. So whatever your burden is, however deep, however dark, however complicated, however much pain that it brings to you, and when you find yourself confronting it, burdened by it, weighed down by it, at any point in the day or in the dark recesses of a night that never seems to end, be reminded of this reality that our God, your God, is the one who daily bears our burdens.

Permanent. But we could also speak of his burden bearing as intimate. The very expression here that is rendered in our version, who daily bears our burdens, can also be rendered in a more personal way with the notion or the idea of who daily bears us, who daily carries us.

So not only our burdens, and we can make a list and say, well, here's one, two, three, four, and God bears those burdens, and yes, that's true, but the possibilities here, and of course we're not limited to this one verse, and in the light of the whole of the testimony of the Bible, we can declare that he carries us, not just our burdens, but he carries ourselves when we are burdened, in that way enabling us, in that way carrying the burdens also, as he carries the burdened ones.

Again, we think of the language of the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 63 and verse 9, listen to the way in which this truth is declared.

In the second half of the verse, speaking of God, we read, in his love and mercy, he redeemed them, he lifted them up, and carried them all the days of old.

[11 : 26] God's relationship with his people, God's love for his people is one that is demonstrated by the manner in which he lifts them up and carries them all the days of old.

Our burden bearer doesn't just offer to carry any given burden, but when required, and he knows when it is required, he is able and willing to carry us.

Something of the nature of this burden bearing. But I also want us to think a little bit about what I'm describing as, or introducing as, the victory that enthrones our God, that enthrones the Lord as our burden bearer.

And here we're looking at what comes before this verse, not allowing ourselves to look at it entirely in isolation, but to see when it is that David erupts in praise in the manner that he does.

What is it that provokes David to declare this truth? He's writing this psalm. In the psalm, there's this historical recounting of the Exodus, and yet he almost interrupts the story with this doxology, with this eruption of praise to God.

[12:49] And the question is why? Why is he so struck by this reality concerning God, that he is the God who is worthy to be praised because he daily bears our burdens?

Well, I'm sure it must have something to do with what he has just declared in what comes before. Perhaps in the whole psalm, but very particularly focusing our attention on verse 18, and the picture that is painted there by the psalmist.

We read there in verse 18, when you ascended on high, you led captives in your train, you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious, that you, O Lord God, might dwell there.

The picture in this verse, and indeed in the previous verse, is a picture of God's deliverance from Egypt through Sinai to the promised land and ultimately to Mount Zion.

And here in verses 17 and 18, this journey that lasted decades is coming to its conclusion. The victory is complete. God, as the victorious king, is entering into his holy place to reside on his holy mountain with his people.

[14:08] Possibly the picture being painted is of the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, finding its intended resting place.

The exodus is over. God has redeemed his people, and God is enthroned in his holy mountain. And as the conquering king, the picture is of him receiving gifts from his captives.

You led captives in your train, you receive gifts from men. But not only does the king receive gifts, but having received gifts, he then dispenses gifts to his soldiers, to his own.

And though here in the psalm, interestingly, the language only is of him receiving gifts, when Paul makes use of the verse, he speaks of gifts being given.

And it's not a contradiction. It's not that Paul didn't realize what he was saying, but really they're one and the same matter. When you understand the picture, the conquering king, receiving from the captives, receiving from the conquered, but then dispensing to his people, he receives and gives.

[15:21] And we'll come back to that in a moment. But notice when we think and limit ourselves for the moment to the picture being painted in the psalm, the ultimate and greatest outcome of the king's victory is his presence with his people.

Verse 18 ends up with this conclusion, this ultimate reality. All of this, all of this journey from Egypt, all of this victorious ascent to Mount Zion, that you, O Lord God, might dwell there, that you might dwell there with your people in the midst of your people.

Well, that's the picture that led the psalmist to erupt in praise, in praise of his burden-bearing God. But let's notice how Paul uses this same picture.

And let's turn to Ephesians chapter 4. We've read the verses that are of interest to us. And within those verses, of course, Paul quoting from this psalm.

Without going into the details of the manner in which Paul employs this verse, what we can say with confidence is that Paul's use of this verse, of verse 18, allows us to see the picture that the psalmist paints as one, though a picture that he paints as he looks back on what has happened in the history of Israel is also a picture that looks forward in prophetic anticipation of Christ's victory, a victory that culminated in his going up, in his ascension, in his exaltation to his heavenly throne to be seated at the right hand of God.

[17:06] Having descended, having come down from heaven to rescue us, to fulfill his saving mission, having descended, he then, having won his victory at Calvary, that victory vindicated at the resurrection, he ascended to the right hand to the Father.

And as the conquering king, ascending to his throne, he showers gifts on his people, and that's the stress that Paul certainly wants to emphasize, even in the manner in which he employs the verse and changes the language of the psalm.

When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men. The king who has received and who, because of his victory, it corresponds that he should receive, then gives to his people.

So Paul uses the verse in that way. And what do we find in Paul's use of the verse? What can we conclude is the outcome of Christ's victory, also in the light of what we've seen in the psalm in the

original setting of the words.

Well, the ultimate outcome of Christ's victory is his presence with his people. This is what the psalmist delights in, that you, O Lord God, might dwell there.

[18 : 31] That is why you ascended on high, that you might dwell with your people. And so, too, the outcome of Christ's victory, that he might dwell with his people.

And we know that that dwelling of God with his people, secured by Christ's victory, is to be experienced and is seen principally in the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, we'll turn in a moment to see how the whole picture that's being painted here can be seen to come to fulfillment in great measure at Pentecost, where Jesus is spoken of having received from the Father, he then gives to his people, and very especially the gift of the Holy Spirit, that God might dwell with his people.

The outcome of his victory, his presence with us, but also his bearing up of his people in both the giving of gifts and in the bearing of burdens. Having won this victory, Christ is enabled and equipped to give gifts and to bear burdens.

Well, let's just think a little bit as we continue exploring this theme of God as our burden bader. Let's just think a little of the manner in which he bears our burdens.

[19 : 51] How does he do that? He presents himself as the one who bears our burdens, but in our day-by-day experience, how does he do that? Well, the manner in which God bears our burdens will be a function of the nature of the burden and what would be most appropriate, what would be the best way of bearing that burden for us.

and also the means that God in his wisdom chooses to employ and perhaps in some cases a combination of means that he chooses to employ to bear our burdens.

Let me try and develop that or explain what I mean by that by giving examples of the ways in which God bears our burdens. We're thinking of this especially in the light of what the psalm suggests as it points forward to Christ as our conquering king who ascended on high having won his victory.

Well, one manner in which he bears our burdens, some of our burdens, is by removing them. He can and does remove great burdens from us. And there we think especially of the burden of our sin, of the burden of our guilt, of the burden of the death that is the fruit of sin.

God simply removes that from us. He removes that from us by the work of his son. Indeed, even in the psalm that is this celebration of God as the God who delivers us from death, the immediately following verse we read, our God is a God who saves, from the sovereign Lord comes, escapes, from death.

[21 : 36] The burden of sin and guilt and death removed by our burden bearing God. But there are other ways. Again, a function of the burden in question in which God bears our burdens.

He helps us to bear our burdens and indeed bears them with us as he strengthens us. And again, we think of the giving of his spirit. Christ as the victorious conqueror who ascended on high and having ascended, received from the Father that which he then gave to his people.

And indeed, this intriguing difference that we have between the psalm where it speaks of the king receiving gifts and Paul's use of the verse when he changes it to speak of the one who ascended giving gifts, these come together really.

we see how they blend together in the light of Pentecost and the gifts given there. And let's just turn very quickly to what we read in Acts chapter 2 and verse 33.

I've kind of alluded to this just a moment ago but let's just actually see what it says there and see how this brings together this picture of gifts received and gifts given in this case by Christ our conquering king.

[22 : 57] In Acts chapter 2 and in verse 23 verse 33 sorry we read as follows exalted to the right hand of God the one who descended now ascends and is exalted to the right hand of God.

And what happens to our conquering king as he ascends to his throne having won the victory?

What are we told? He has received from the father the promised holy spirit and what does he do with the gift that he receives from the father and has poured out what you now see and hear.

So our conquering king he ascends having won the victory he receives from the father his due his reward you might say but what he receives he then dispenses he then gives to his people and very especially what does he give?

He gives the Holy Spirit God himself dwelling with his people. How does God bear our burdens? By removing them by strengthening us to confront them by giving us the strength himself in his own

person but then also we might say that he bears our burdens by sharing them.

What do I mean by that? Paul is clear in the passage there in Ephesians that the gifts given by the ascended Christ the Holy Spirit himself but also in the passage in Ephesians it speaks of different ministries that are gifts to God's church but the point is that these gifts are for the good of the whole they're not for the benefit of the individual they're for the good of the whole to use the language of Paul in Ephesians that the body of Christ might be built up.

[24 : 48] When we think of that reality and apply it to the matter of burden bearing then we see that we who receive are also called to give and to share each other's burdens.

Paul uses that very language in encouraging and challenging the believers in Galatia in chapter 6 and in verse 2 of that epistle he calls on God's people to carry or bear each other's burdens.

This is one way in which God acts as our burden bearer by challenging us and by encouraging us to share each other's burdens. This is not God standing back and saying well I don't want to do this anymore.

No this is one of the ways in which God bears our burdens by sharing them by encouraging us to help each other bear our burdens.

many ways and perhaps others that we could think of in which God acts as our burden bearing God. But then finally let's just notice what is an appropriate and fitting response on behalf of the burdened on behalf of us.

[26 : 02] Let me suggest two ways in which we can respond. The first one may seem somewhat cold almost inappropriate the language we use him.

That's right we use God. You say well that's not very fitting language. How are we to use God? And yet what is the point of an unused burden bearer?

If God says to us I love you I bore you and I am willing to be your burden bearer then what is the point of us not making use of a God who offers himself in this way.

We need to listen and heed the call of Peter in his letter in verse Peter chapter 5 in verse 7 cast all your anxiety all your burdens on him because he cares for you.

The point is that we need to do that. We need to cast our anxiety on him. He is able and he is willing but it corresponds to us to cast upon him. our anxiety our burdens.

[27 : 12] Now the reality is God is so gracious that even when we foolishly fail to do so he doesn't remain aloof and will take the initiative often but that does not free us from our irresponsibility to cast upon him our anxiety our burdens.

We use him and that is not inappropriate because he offers himself in this way. It would be a foolish thing to have one who is willing and able to help us and for us to say well I'm not going to make use of God in this way.

I'm going to carry my burdens by myself. As I was thinking of just the foolishness of that for some reason to my mind came the work that is going to be done here in the building and among the different parts of the work a lift is going to be installed.

Now imagine some of us by the grace of God have the capacity to come up and down stairs without much difficulty but that's not true of all. For some it's a real struggle to make their way from this level of the building to the lower level.

Some can't do it at all and for some it's a very difficult challenge. Now imagine if once the building is refurbished and there's a lift available and somebody who faces that difficulty for whom it's very difficult to make it from this level down to the lower level and somebody says well there's the lift just use the lift and they say no no no no no I'm not going to use the lift no I don't want to use the lift I'll just struggle on down I can do it I've done it for years I'll just do it I'm not going to use the lift I think we'd say well that's just silly that's what it's there for it's there to help you use it imagine in a much greater way if God is saying to you I am your burden bearer I daily bear your burdens imagine if we were to say well I don't want you to bear my burdens I'm going to struggle on by myself and see how best I can do how do we respond well we use the one who graciously offers himself in this way but of course with the psalmist we also praise him that he is such a God the very description of God that the psalmist provides for us in our text is in the context of him praising

[29 : 34] God and what does he say well he says this praise be to the Lord to God our Savior who daily bears our burdens one who so loves us one who so descended that he might then ascend for us that he might be our burden bearer is worthy of our joyful and grateful praise and so we do join with the psalmist in praising him praise be to the Lord to God our Savior who daily bears our burdens let's pray heavenly father we come and we we stand in grateful awe of such a God the God

who is the creator of the universe the almighty God the altogether sovereign one and yet one who condescends in this way to bear our burdens we thank you very especially for the manner in which you have provided for our greatest burdens in and through your son

Jesus Christ the one who descended to this earth to descended even to the cross and to death on the cross and having died in our place his victory over sin and death vindicated by the resurrection ascended to your right hand we thank you that as the conquering king he dispenses gifts to us he provides for us and carries our burdens and we pray that we would know what it is the relief to be found in casting our cares and our anxieties and our burdens upon yourself and all of these things we pray in Jesus name amen for to have thanks to understand yes of this anything is going to o so and as