

Psalm 41

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 February 2006

Preacher: Daniel Sladek

- [0 : 0 0] You'll turn with me to the passage which we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 41. We'll be considering that passage this morning. What kind of people should you be?
- What sort of attitude should characterize you? How does God want you to behave as his people? Well, the answer to that question is the first thing we find as we come to this psalm.
- This psalm tells us what character God desires his people to have. We read that in the very first verse. Blessed is he who has regard for the weak.
- That's the sort of people that God wants you to be. To have regard for the weak. But this word that's used here, translated weak, it's a word that's often used to describe people who are poor.
- It can mean someone who's literally poor, financially poor. Or someone who is powerless. Someone who is helpless. God tells us that he wants us to have regard for that sort of person.
- [1 : 2 2] And this word which is translated regard is an interesting word. It's a word which normally is used to give attention to something. For instance, we read elsewhere in the Old Testament that it's all of the people gathered to hear the word of God read.
- That the people gave attention to the words of the law. They had regard for them. They paid attention to these words, trying to understand them.
- That's the way the word is normally used. And that's what God is telling us he wants us to do for the poor. For those who are weak and helpless. He wants us to pay attention to them.
- To seek to understand them. To take time for them. Now, as we think about what God calls us here, calls us to do here, this is something that we don't like to do, is it?
- We don't like to do this sort of thing, first of all, because it takes time, doesn't it? It's not speaking about just occasionally doing something for somebody.
- [2 : 3 3] It's taking time for them. Seeking to understand them. Their life, their situation, everything they're going through. And we're very busy people. We don't have time to do that sort of thing.
- So we don't like it because of the time involved. But as well, we don't like it. Because it means that we might actually have to get involved in their life. And that might be something that we really don't want to do.
- We like to live our own lives. We like to look after ourselves. We don't really want to have other people getting involved in our lives. We don't want to have to be involved in their lives.
- But that is what God calls you to. He calls you to have regard for the weak, for the poor, for the powerless. As we consider that, it's not surprising that that's the way that God wants his people to behave, is it?

Because as we look in the Psalms, we see that in fact, that's the way God behaves. If you look with me, for instance, in Psalm 10. There in verse 12 of Psalm 10, we read, Arise, Lord, lift up your hand, O God.

[3 : 54] Do not forget the helpless. Again in verse 14. But you, O God, do see trouble and grief. You consider it and take it in hand.

The victim commits himself to you. You are the helper of the fatherless. Again at the end of the Psalm. You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted.

You encourage them and listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man who is of the earth may terrify no more. This is precisely the sort of thing that God does.

He hears. He takes note of. He pays attention to the fatherless, to the widow, to the helpless. He cares for them.

And as his people, he calls upon you to behave in the same way, to have regard for the poor, to be concerned about them, and actually to do something.

[5 : 01] We notice the importance of this in this Psalm when we see the blessing that's attached to it. Blessed is he who has regard for the weak. Then we're told, the Lord delivers him in times of trouble.

The Lord will protect him and preserve his life. He will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.

This is so important to God that he says that people who do this sort of thing will be protected by him. But as we consider this, and as we look at the promises that God here makes, it raises a question, doesn't it?

Is this true? Is this true? Does God really do this? I ask the question because I'm sure all of us can think of people who were compassionate.

They did make time for other people. And yet, very often it seems they are precisely the people who do suffer. We can all think of contemporary examples.

[6 : 12] We can think of people who have gone to the nation of Iraq. Some of them Christians with the desire to help people there. And very often, perversely, it seems that they are the people who end up being kidnapped.

Tortured, perhaps even killed. Does God really do this? As we think of examples, we can think indeed of the example of David.

David wrote this psalm, didn't he? We notice at the beginning of it, the title. We're told it's a psalm of David. This is a psalm which is appropriate for David because, as king, this was precisely the sort of thing that God commanded him to do, to have regard for the weak, for the poor, for the helpless.

David here seems to be invoking these promises, but is God answering him? As we go on to read of what's happening to David, is God keeping his word?

The ultimate example, of course, that we can think of is Jesus. Jesus had regard for the poor, didn't he? More than any of us.

[7 : 26] More than David. Therefore, Jesus, more than anyone else, deserved the protection that's here promised. And yet, nobody has suffered more than Jesus.

Jesus' life, most gives rise to the question, this tension between what God has promised here and the suffering of the righteous.

And yet, it is also Jesus' life that gives us the answer to this question. And so, as we consider this psalm and as we consider the promises that God here makes, I'd like us to consider it in light of Jesus' life, looking at the three sections of this psalm in light of what God has done through Jesus.

Now, we consider the first part of this psalm, the command that we find here, the characteristic that describes the way that God wants his people to behave. Blessed is he who has regard for the weak, has regard for the poor, for the helpless.

Jesus knew what it was like to be poor, didn't he? He knew what it was like literally to be poor. We note the birth that he had.

[8 : 46] He was born probably not even in a house, in a stable. We notice, for instance, the sacrifices that were made when they brought him to the temple to be dedicated. They were the sacrifices that poor people made.

So he started out in a family that was very poor. But not only that, at the beginning of his life, we read about both Joseph and Mary, his mother and his father.

But later on, at the end of the Gospel, we read only about Mary. There is no mention made of Joseph. The most likely answer to that question is that Joseph had died.

Not only was Jesus from a family that was poor to begin with, he was fatherless. His mother was left on her own.

And so it's not surprising then, just as we read through the Gospels, we find that Jesus has regard for the poor, for the helpless. He can sympathize with them.

[9 : 47] We think, for instance, of the leper that came to Jesus. Now, lepers were people who were outcasts. Indeed, God's word commanded that lepers were to dwell outside of the community.

They weren't allowed to approach anyone. And yet this man with this disease came up to Jesus. Not only did Jesus allow him to approach him, not only did Jesus heal him, Jesus could have healed him from as far away as I am from you.

But Jesus touched him. Jesus had compassion on him. Jesus did what nobody else would have done for this man. How long would it have been since any other person had touched him?

We can think of the widow of Nain. Jesus was passing that village and he saw a man, the only son of his mother, being carried out dead. And Jesus saw this woman.

And Luke tells us that his heart went out to her. Jesus stopped what he was doing, where he was going. And Jesus made time for her. Jesus raised her son from the dead.

[11 : 03] Jesus had regard for the poor. As we consider that, it's important that you remember that Jesus still has regard for the poor.

Jesus' character hasn't changed. This same Jesus who reached out and touched this man with leprosy.

This same man whose heart went out to this widow. He is still sympathetic. He is still compassionate. He is still merciful. We live in a society where there's very little compassion, where people have very little time for each other.

Even as God's people, we very often have little time for one another. But if you're looking for sympathy, if you're looking for compassion, if you're looking for someone who has regard for people who are helpless, who are poor, who are outcasts, it is Jesus.

Jesus has time for you. Jesus has compassion for you. In spite of the fact that he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, he is the one who sustains all of creation.

[12 : 23] And yet he knows each one of you intimately. He cares for you and he's concerned for you. In spite of your sin, in spite of your rebellion, and all that you've done against him.

Jesus has regard for the poor. Jesus is compassionate. So as we consider the first part of this psalm, the characteristic that it sets before us there, you should remember that more than any of us, Jesus is the one who has regard for the weak.

And yet, ironically, Jesus is the one who has suffered. If we look at the second part of the psalm, verses 4 to 9, we can look at this part of the psalm in light of Jesus' life as well.

Think, for instance, of verse 5. My enemy saved me in malice. When will he die and his name perish? That was Jesus' enemy's greatest desire, wasn't it?

To wipe his name off the face of the earth. That people would stop speaking about this man. That they would forget about him and move on. In verse 6 we read, Whenever one comes to me, he speaks falsely while his heart gathers slander.

[13 : 49] And he goes out and spreads it abroad. How often did Jesus' enemies do precisely that? Going to him, feigning respect, coming to him with some question that they wanted the answer to.

And yet, all the while, all they really wanted was something to use against him. Seeking to trick him and to trap him so that they could hand him over.

Again, so that they could get rid of him. All my enemies whispered together against me. They imagined the worst for me, saying, A vile disease has beset him.

He will never get up from the place where he lies. Again, constantly his enemies whispered against him, plotted how they could get rid of Jesus. And then, finally, when he was in their clutches, it would seem, hanging on the cross, they hovered around him like vultures, taunting him, saying he would never rise again.

He was done. He was finished. Finally, they'd gotten rid of him. And indeed, in verse 9, even my close friend whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

[15 : 05] Who was it who handed Jesus over to be arrested? Not, in fact, his enemies. One of his closest friends. someone who had shared bread off his table.

Someone he himself had chosen. Judas, his friend, had betrayed him. Jesus himself, indeed, quotes this verse in John chapter 13, saying that Judas did what he did so that scripture would be fulfilled.

More than any of us, Jesus knows what it was like to suffer. And again, we pause and consider why he did that. Why did Jesus suffer?

Why did Jesus die? Not for his own sake, because he was the only person who didn't deserve any suffering. what happened to Jesus is what sin deserves.

It's what your sin deserves. It's what each one of us as sinners deserve. To be rejected, not merely by the human race, but to be rejected by God.

[16 : 25] To be cursed by him. And Jesus did that. He went through all of this for your sake, so that your sins could be forgiven.

So we see that Jesus had regard for the poor, and yet, more than any of us, Jesus knew what it was to suffer. Now, before we go on to the third part of the psalm, you may have noticed as we were going through the second part, looking at each of these verses in light of Jesus' life, verses 5 and 6 and 7 and 8 to 9.

You may have noticed if you were following along that I missed out one of these verses. Verse 4. I said, O Lord, have mercy on me, heal me, for I have sinned against you.

Now, what are we to make of a psalm like that? One verse of this psalm, verse 9, is quoted by Jesus, and he says that certain things had to happen to him so that this verse could be fulfilled.

And yet, another verse in this psalm, verse 4, says something that couldn't possibly be true of Jesus. Jesus didn't have to ask for the Father to have mercy upon him because of his sins, because Jesus never had sinned.

[17 : 48] So, what are we to make of a psalm that brings together things that had to be fulfilled in Jesus and other things that don't apply to him? Well, I would suggest that as we try to understand how to bring these things together, you shouldn't imagine that scattered throughout the Old Testament here and there are verses that were specific prophecies about Jesus that were found in the midst of other verses that had nothing to do with him.

Rather, we read this psalm as a whole and as we do so, we find that a theme emerges. The theme of this psalm is the unjust suffering of God's King.

Now, this theme is the same as many of the themes in other psalms and in the midst of these psalms with this theme there are specific details of the psalms.

Now, sometimes those specific details were true only of David. David wrote Psalm 41. David, like the rest of us, was a sinner and so David could say, O Lord, have mercy on me, heal me, for I have sinned against you.

At other times, these specific details in God's providence are true of Jesus. In verse 9, we read, even my close friend whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

[19 : 23] We've sung from Psalm 22. Many of the details of that psalm were fulfilled exactly in Jesus' life. But ultimately, it's a question of the theme of this psalm.

And the theme of it is the unjust suffering of God's King. we find it fulfilled in Jesus, in his unjust suffering. And so, as we think of that theme, as we see it pointing us forward to Jesus, what are we to do with that tension?

We've seen at the beginning of this psalm that God promises blessing, he promises protection to those who have regard for the weak. And we've seen that more than any of us, Jesus has done that.

Jesus deserved those blessings. And yet, Jesus suffered. How is it that the righteous can suffer?

How is it that Jesus can suffer in light of the promises that God made to him? Well, the answer is found in the third part of this psalm.

[20 : 33] In verse 10, But you, O Lord, have mercy on me. Raise me up that I may repay them. I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me.

In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever. In the first part of this psalm, God had promised that he would do this.

the Lord will do that. The Lord will do that. He will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes.

The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness. In the first part of this psalm, God promises that he will do that. The psalmist is here asking God to do that.

At the end of this psalm, we see his faith that God will do that. And that is precisely what God has done for Jesus, is it not? We read in the New Testament in Acts chapter 2.

[21 : 46] Peter there is preaching and in verse 22 he says, Men of Israel, listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was not possible for death to keep its hold on him. again in verse 31.

Seeing what was ahead, David spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

God did keep his word. God did protect Jesus. He didn't ultimately surrender him to his enemies. He didn't ultimately surrender him to the grave.

[23 : 01] He has delivered him. He raised him from the dead, and he seated him at his right hand in heaven. In my integrity, you uphold me, and set me in your presence forever.

That's the answer to this tension. The promises that God has made in the face of the sufferings of Jesus. The answer is in the resurrection.

The answer is in the fact that Jesus is alive, and that he's sitting in heaven. And so God has kept his promises. So what difference does this make to you?

That the Father has kept his promises to Jesus. God makes all the difference in the world, doesn't it? Because you can know that just as he kept his promises in Jesus, so he will keep his promises to you.

What is it that discourages you? Do your sins discourage you? Do you sometimes think to yourself that someone like me could never possibly belong to God?

[24 : 20] Someone like me has no right to enter God's presence. On your own you don't. But you don't approach God on your own.

You approach him in Jesus Christ. And you know that Christ suffered and died to forgive your sins. And you know indeed that not only did he die, but that he's been raised from the dead.

And Paul tells us that in Christ, even now we're seated in heavenly places. Do the trials and difficulties that you go through in this life discourage you?

You can know that however difficult they are, however severe they are, none of us has ever suffered like what Jesus has suffered. And yet the Father didn't abandon him.

he kept his word to the Son. He's raised him and seated him in heaven. And so too you can know that whatever you go through in this life, however difficult it is, however painful, however much you don't understand why it's happening to you, nevertheless you can know that there is nothing in this world which can separate you from God's love.

[25 : 43] death. You can know that one day, just as Jesus has been raised from the dead, so too you will be raised from the dead, when all of these trials and difficulties and pains have passed away.

so as you consider God's word this morning, as you go from here, remember this psalm, remember the character that it sets before you, the way that God would have you behave, that he would have us have regard for the weak, and remember most of all the way that it points you to your Savior, Jesus Christ, to his compassion, to his mercy, to his suffering, but also to his resurrection, which is all of our hope.

As we conclude this morning, we'll do so singing to God's praise from this psalm.

We sing in the traditional version of the psalms, Psalm 41. You'll find this on page 262 of the psalm book.

The tune is Morphant. We sing verses 10 to 13. But Lord, be merciful to me, and up again me raise, that I may justly them requite according to their ways.

[27 : 14] We stand to sing Psalm 41. Lord God, we praise you that you are the only true God. You are the God who is eternally blessed.

We praise you for all that you have done for us, and we ask that you would now be with each one of us as we go from here. May each one of us know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of your Holy Spirit.

We pray this in our Savior's name. Amen. word of God, I am with the other Christ.