

Psalm 147

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: 08 December 2019

Preacher: Alex J MacDonald

[0 : 00] Could you turn back with me now to that passage we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 147, and especially words there in verse 3, He heals the brokenhearted.

There are many causes of heartbreak in the world.

Here in this passage, it's thinking about exile, the people being exiled. It mentions in verse 2 the exiles of Israel. You know how because of the sin and rebellion of the people, they were carried away into exile.

And of course, that's one great cause of heartbreak. We see so many people today having to be refugees, having to leave their own country and be in a foreign country, and the heartbreak of leaving home.

There are other kinds of heartbreak. Perhaps something that you've set your heart on doesn't come true. Your dreams have turned to dust. Or perhaps it's some break in family life.

[1 : 15] Or perhaps the loss of a loved one. Queen Victoria, on the death of her husband, Prince Albert, said, The poor fatherless baby of eight months is now the utterly brokenhearted and crushed widow of 42.

My life as a happy one has ended. The world is gone for me. And indeed, for the rest of her life, she appeared to be totally brokenhearted over that loss.

And of course, it is especially over the breakup of relationship, whether it is through death or through a breakdown of trust or breakdown in other ways of relationship, that so often we suffer heartbreak.

When Katie Holmes filed for divorce from her famous husband, the actor Tom Cruise, a friend said of him, He looks like a broken man.

He is one of the most famous people on the planet. Yet when you see him now, he looks like one of the saddest. And of course, pop songs are full of references to heartbreak.

[2 : 22] Jimmy Ruffin had a famous song called What Becomes of the Brokenhearted. As I walk this land of broken dreams, I have visions of many things. Love's happiness is just an illusion, filled with sadness and confusion.

What becomes of the brokenhearted who had love that's now departed? I know I've got to find some kind of peace of mind. And of course, it's not just in recent times.

Our national poet, Robert Burns, in his song, A-Fond Kiss, said, Had we never loved so kindly, had we never loved so blindly, never met or never parted, we had ne'er been brokenhearted.

Now, of course, some people try to deal with heartbreak by being hard and cynical about it. Bruce Springsteen has a song called Badlands. Badlands, you've got to live it every day.

Let the broken heart stand as the price you've got to pay. Or one of Tina Turner's songs. What's love got to do with it? What's love but a second-hand emotion?

- [3 : 27] What's love got to do with it? Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken? So sometimes we just put a hard shell around us and be cynical about it.
- But other people try to deal with heartbreak by a kind of blind optimism. The Beatles have a famous song called Let It Be. And when the brokenhearted people living in the world agree, there will be an answer.
- Let it be. Let it be. For though they may be parted, there is still a chance that they will see there will be an answer. Let it be. It's just a kind of blind optimism.
- No reason for why it might all work out, but we just hope somehow it will. By contrast with all of that, I believe that the Bible does have an answer to our brokenheartedness.
- And we have it here in this verse. God heals the brokenhearted. And the first lesson I want to draw from that is quite simply this. That this is telling us that God cares for the heartbroken.
- [4 : 33] God cares for us when we're heartbroken. He takes our heartbreak seriously. He recognizes it as a reality. And you know, that gives us permission to be heartbroken.
- We've got to face up to the fact that sometimes in life these experiences will come to us. And we shouldn't try to cover it up or pretend that everything's all right. When we're heartbroken, we are heartbroken.
- And this is the very opposite of the kind of macho posturing of Rudyard Kipling's poem, If a Father's Advice to His Son.
- It's one of these poems that comes always the top or near the top of the nation's favorite poems. It's not a Christian poem. It's a stoic poem. The idea that no matter what happens, you're emotionally untouched by it all.
- If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you, you'll be a man, my son. Well, that's just nonsense. Because the greatest man who ever lived was heartbroken.
- [5 : 42] The Lord Jesus. He wept at the grave of His friend Lazarus. He was heartbroken. And if Jesus was, surely that gives permission for us to express that heartbreak when that's our experience.
- Of course, we can try to shield ourselves from heartbreak. Paul Simon had a song called, I Am a Rock. I'm shielding in my armor, hiding in my room, safe within my womb.
- I touch no one and no one touches me. I'm a rock. I am an island. And a rock feels no pain. And an island never cries. But I think, actually, in that song, he's expressing a kind of irony.
- That that's the way he would like to be. But that's not the way things really are. He seems to protest too much. It's only those who love who are heartbroken.
- C.S. Lewis has a very insightful passage in his book, The Four Loves, where he explains four different types of love. He says, To love at all is to love at all is to be vulnerable.
- [6 : 59] Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it around carefully with hobbies and little luxuries.
- Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change.
- It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable. So again, here's an encouragement to us.
- That when we're heartbroken, it's because we've loved someone or something outside of ourselves. It speaks of something that's unselfish. Now, of course, we all know heartbreaks in life, disappointments in life and love, griefs and pains and secret hurts.

We mustn't pretend that we're not hurt, that our heart isn't breaking, because there's something worse than having a broken heart, and that's having a heart of stone. Oscar Wilde, the great Victorian writer, in his book *De Profundis*, says, The most terrible thing about it is not that it breaks one's heart.

[8 : 19] Hearts are made to be broken, but that it turns one's heart to stone. One of the greatest things about God's care is that it gives us permission to be honest with ourselves.

It's all right to have a broken heart, because God cares for the broken hearted. He recognizes that reality in our experience. That is not the beginning.

Sorry, that is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning. But you know, there's an even greater thing than this. To know that God cares for us.

God heals the broken hearted. God cares for us. No one else may care, but God does. No one else may know even, but God knows.

God heals the broken hearted. So, who is this God who cares then? Who is this God that this psalm is speaking about? Well, in this psalm, we see some description given of this God who cares for the broken hearted.

[9 : 22] The first thing we notice in verses 4 and 5 is that He is almighty and sovereign. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power.

His understanding has no limit. After all, the one we're talking about is the creator of the universe. This psalm, amazingly, as it speaks of healing the broken hearted, it immediately goes on to speak of His determining the number of the stars.

He has created those stars. Now, in the ancient world, stars were a marvel. To look up in the sky at night without any artificial lighting was just amazing.

But today, we know even more about the vastness of this universe and the vast number of those stars far beyond our comprehension. And yet, He has created them and He determines the number of them.

He knows them intimately. He calls them by name. We've named some of the stars, but we don't know all of them. But He knows them all by name.

[10 : 33] So, nothing is too hard for this God. If He has an intimate knowledge of the stars, surely He has an intimate knowledge of your broken heart.

And if He has determined the number of the stars and calls them by name and knows everything about them, He knows everything about us and all the circumstances around what may be breaking our hearts.

The second thing we see about His being sovereign and almighty is that He provides for His creatures. In verses 8 and 9, we see that. He covers the sky with clouds.

He supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. We're reminded of the words of Jesus.

You know, if He clothes the grass of the field and feeds the birds of the air, shall He not also provide for us? And so, let us never think in our experience, however heartbroken we are, or however much we feel things may have gone wrong, that God has forgotten about us or God is unable to help us.

[11 : 41] He provides for His creation in every way. So surely He will provide for His people. Jesus says, Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from our heavenly Father, and you are worth more than many sparrows.

He speaks there of the dignity and the worth of a human being, especially someone who is a child of God. How can He forget you? How can He not care about your broken heart?

But there's something else that we see about God here in this passage, and that is that He's righteous. In verse 6, we read there, The Lord sustains the humble, but casts the wicked to the ground.

It speaks of God's judgment. In His care and in His love, He remains righteous and holy. You know, when we've been talking about God caring for the brokenhearted, and God healing the brokenhearted, we may think God is just all soft.

But you know, there is also a hardness about God, the hardness of justice and righteousness. He doesn't condone wickedness, either wickedness done by you to others, or by others to you.

[13 : 01] He's not a soft touch. Think of the Lord Jesus. He was full of compassion, as we were thinking about this morning, to even someone who suffered from leprosy, untouchable, outcast.

But He also had hard words for those who were self-righteous, and who trusted in themselves like the Pharisees. He spoke words of judgment, as well as words of grace.

Now, this is something that's greatly liberating, to know that we don't need to keep going over the hurt that has perhaps been done to us by others, that has caused the heartbreak. Even the hurtful words.

Linda McCartney adapted, you know, the old proverb, sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you. She said, sticks and stones can break your bones, but words will break my heart.

And isn't that so true? It's so often words that are so hurtful and cause pain, and perhaps something that we keep going over and over in our mind again.

[14 : 07] We don't need to keep going over those things, because God is just. God will bring those who have caused harm to judgment.

It's not up to us. Whether it is the cruelty of words, or whether it is even worse, cruelty of abuse, or whatever, God will judge those who have caused the heartbreak.

You don't need to blame yourself for it, because so often people who are the victims of heartbreak in various ways are the victims of abuse. They blame themselves. They see themselves as somehow being guilty and shameful.

We don't need to do that, because God will sort things out, and God will declare us innocent if we trust in Him. God will bring everyone to justice, the heartbreakers, the abusers, the manipulators.

He will bring the wicked down. We don't need to keep going over it. But also this God here is described in the psalm as merciful. In verse 11, we have these words, The Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love.

[15 : 20] Now this word that's translated by unfailing love, it's translated in all sorts of different ways in the Bible and in different versions of the Bible. Loving kindness, mercy, steadfast love.

It really is God's covenant love. Love, this word is attached to the whole idea of covenant, that God has made a covenant with His people, and He'll be faithful to it.

It is His faithful, loving kindness towards His people. We all need His love and His forgiveness. Sometimes our heart and our heartbreak is self-inflicted by our own foolishness or our own willfulness.

Sometimes it's inflicted by others on us. Sometimes it's inflicted by us on others. And His love covers all of those circumstances.

If we need forgiveness for what we have done to others, we can ask that forgiveness and find it. That is forgiveness, full and free.

[16 : 29] He is merciful. But the great thing about the covenant love is this. In the covenant, God takes the initiative.

He establishes His covenant with us through the Lord Jesus. We live in a world where all the emphasis is upon us, upon what human beings can do and will do.

And we're all taught to think that we can achieve whatever we want. Well, there's one thing we cannot achieve. Maybe there's a lot of things we can't achieve.

There's one thing we can never achieve. We can never put ourselves right with God. Only He can do it in His great covenant love. And He has done it through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is available to us. He has taken the initiative in Jesus. And He takes the initiative in coming to us this evening and saying, It is finished. The work is done.

[17 : 28] All you have to do is to receive it. So, this is the God who heals our hearts, our broken hearts. But how exactly can our broken hearts be healed?

In John chapter 5, verse 6, Jesus says to the disabled man that He met at the pool of Bethesda, He says to him, Do you want to be whole? That's the way it's translated in the authorized version.

It's a good translation. Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be whole? Because you see, in physical illness, there's a disruption, a dislocation, a disintegration of normal processes.

And healing means to be made whole again. When we are brokenhearted, there's a similar disruption in our mental and emotional processes.

We're shattered. Jesus can make us whole again. Jesus can heal our broken hearts. Jesus can put us together again, just as easily as He healed that man's physical disability.

[18 : 38] But isn't it an interesting question that Jesus asks the man? He says, Do you want to be whole? Often, Jesus asks strange questions of people, and you might wonder, Why is He asking this man, Do you want to be whole?

Do you want to be healed? Surely, of course, He wants to be. But you know, It's all too possible for us to be self-indulgent in our misery, to wallow in self-pity.

It's our kind of badge that we've been a victim, or that we're brokenhearted, or whatever it is. Because, you see, the operation to heal a broken heart may be painful.

So, most operations are. We may have to face up to things about ourselves that are uncomfortable in this healing operation that God embarks on in healing our broken hearts.

But, of course, this is part of Jesus' purpose in coming into the world. He quoted Isaiah chapter 61 when He spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth.

[19 : 47] The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn.

And while Jesus was healing the heartbreak of others, He Himself suffered overwhelming heartbreak, not only as He saw all the hurt and harm that sin had caused in the world, but as He came to Gethsemane and as He came to Golgotha, where He bore the sins of the world on Himself.

Some medical experts believe that Jesus died literally of a broken heart or a ruptured heart.

And the reason for that is the evidence that John gives in his gospel in chapter 19, verse 34, that when the soldier took a spear and thrust it into Jesus' side, what came out was blood and water.

If Jesus had still been living, blood would have pumped out, arterial blood. But what came out, John noticed, was blood and water.

[21 : 13] And medical experts have said that that was proof positive that Jesus had already died, that His heart had ruptured. It was clotted blood and watery serum.

Now, be that as it may, whether that is the actual facts of the case, I'm in no position to judge. But what I do know is this, that Jesus endured emotional heartbreak on the cross, loss of relationship with His Father.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? You know, the greatest pain that we can ever feel is over the loss of relationship.

And this was the greatest relationship that there has ever been between Father and Son. And there on the cross, Jesus lost all sense of that love of God as He bore the wrath of God because of our sin.

Jesus on the cross was taking the burden of our sin and guilt to set us free. But it also means that He empathizes with you in your heartbreak.

[22 : 22] He knows emotionally, He knows from the inside what that is like in a greater way than we can ever know. There is another aspect to all of this, a very challenging aspect.

In Psalm 51, verse 17, David says, Now we may know what it is to be heartbroken over our heart, the hurt or harm done to us by others or by circumstances.

But are we also heartbroken over our sin? Because that's what David is expressing in this psalm. He's speaking there of his sin with Bathsheba and is procuring the murder of her husband, Uriah.

Horrible, horrible sins. And yet, he knew that a broken and contrite heart God would not despise.

And God forgave him. As is well known, Oscar Wilde, whom I mentioned earlier, was convicted and sent to prison because of a homosexual relationship.

[23 : 39] But from then on, he expressed penitence and a rejection of his earlier philosophy of pleasure. And in his amazing poem, The Ballad of Reading Jail, he asked the very insightful question, How else but through a broken heart may Lord Christ enter in?

Dylan has a song called Everything is Broken. Broken dishes, broken parts, streets are filled with broken hearts, broken words never meant to be spoken, everything is broken.

And of course, it's fashionable to speak today of a broken society, broken families, broken relationships, broken communities, but nobody has the least clue as to how to fix them.

The answer begins with a broken heart. Not only broken because of what has been done to us, but broken because of what we have done to others and done to God.

How else but through a broken heart may Lord Christ enter in? The Proclaimers have a well-known song called Sunshine on Leaf.

[24 : 53] My heart was broken. My heart was broken. You saw it. You claimed it. You touched it. You saved it. While I'm worth this room, with my room on this earth, I will be with you.

While the chief puts sunshine on leaf, I'll ask him for his work and your birth and my birth. My heart was broken.

You saw it. You claimed it. You touched it. You saved it. That's an exact expression of what the gospel is. Our hearts are broken, broken by sin.

And if we come before God recognizing our sin, then surely we are brokenhearted and contrite. Recognizing that it is only His great grace that sees our brokenheartedness, that claims our hearts, touches our hearts, and saves us.

He heals the brokenhearted. Let's pray. O gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we recognize as we come before You so many causes of heartbreak in the world and in our own experience, the times when we've wept bitter tears over our own foolishness or over the hurt done to us by others.

[26 : 25] and we see around us so many broken hearts. O Lord, our God, we thank You that Your heart goes out to us and Your heart goes out to all those who are heartbroken.

O Lord, we thank You for the healing balm of the gospel, that there is a God in heaven who cares for us, the God who sent His Son into this world to heal broken hearts, who is brokenhearted, that they may know that healing power of Jesus.

And we pray that we might bring that good news of His grace and love to others around us who may be brokenhearted. give us sensitivity to see that people who may have an outward hard shell may inwardly be hurting and suffering.

And Lord, we pray that we might have compassion. Lord, our gracious God, we pray that You would be with us as we seek to live for You.

We've begun a new week, enable us to dedicate the days of this week to You and to seek to work for You in all that we do. Look down in mercy upon us, heal us, renew us, empower us, grant us a quickening of new life, grant us the presence of Your Spirit, grant us to know Your presence with us, Your loving kindness, day by day, moment by moment.

[28 : 10] that we may praise the name of the Lord Jesus and cause others so to praise Him. We ask all of this in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.