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Psalms 81 "A Brokenhearted Father" July 8, 2018

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 81.

There is a principle that runs through the scriptures that really begins at the beginning when God gave to Adam and Eve all that was in the garden, and then Adam and Eve at some point decided they would worship a different god, and the consequences were brutal; death and suffering that would follow. You saw it in the nation of Israel when they were slaves, made slaves in Egypt, that they cried out to the Lord, and God, seeing their suffering, sent a deliverer, Moses, and God brought them out with a strong, a high hand. And you would think that by the time they got into the wilderness, they would be a people that were as grateful as they could be, but instead it wasn't long before they were complaining to God about His treatment, were bowing their knees to a false god that they had met in Egypt, and they found themselves again having to die in the wilderness rather than entering into the land of promise.

You find it during the time of the Judges, when God wanted to be the Lord of the nation, and the people were drawn constantly to the gods of the world. And the Lord, because He's a good God, dealt with the people, and they suffered as a result. And then they cried out for deliverance and God every time sent them a deliverer, and they'd go right back to it again. The deliverance from Egypt and then the captivity later on in 600 BC to the Babylonians, because they'd been warned for 400 years quit following these foreign gods. Come and let Me be your God. And yet though God had done such glorious things in their lives, they continued to worship idols. And so they went into captivity for 70 years, and again, to learn not to replace the Lord with some lesser god.

Same things are true for your lives and mine. We get brought out of Egypt; right? Out of the world. God saves us by His Son. And yet the big battle is for your affection. God has a pretty good argument how He's treated us, what He's done for us, what He's promised to do, and yet so often it's like pulling teeth to get people to get their Bible out and -- or make their decisions based upon the scriptures or list their priorities that the Lord is first, not fifth or eighth or 12th. And the battle continues. And God has so much

that He would like to do, but so often He finds us in a place that He can't do what He'd like to do. And that's the obvious lesson of this Psalm. The Lord will say to His people, open your mouth wide. I'll fill it. He'll lament, oh, if My people would just listen, here's what I could do. The last three or four verses, here's what I would have done for them, but they chose to go it alone.

You could entitle the Psalm "A Brokenhearted Father," but it is a call to, honestly self-evaluate how much your desire is to obey the Lord; how much of your life do you govern by the things that God has taught you; how much of your devotion is to keep Him as the Lord of your life over other things that take your time. It is the heart of God towards His people, the will of God for His people, the responsibility to respond, and how little that we do.

This Psalm is a conclusion, or I should say culmination maybe, of several Psalms that begin in Psalm 77, written by Asaph, almost looking forward to the captivity that is coming in Babylon. It's a prophetic Psalm because it won't happen for about 400 years, but it follows the same kind of format. There is a Psalm 77, which sees the destruction coming for the people that have just chosen

again to not let God be God, to replace Him. Psalm 78 is a really long Psalm of history that highlights the fact that it has always been this unbelief that drove the previous generations to destruction.

In Psalm 79 that destruction has come. The temple has been looted and burned to the ground. There are dead in the streets. Psalm 80 is a prayer of restoration. In fact, you'll read towards the end of the Psalm there where the people cry out, oh, God, deliver us. Bring life back to this place that's been burned to the ground.

Which brings you to this Psalm where if it is indeed ultimately looking to the Babylonian captivity, where the Psalmist says to the people, prophetically so, let's keep the feast days while we are in a land where you can't understand the language. Let's begin to put the Lord first in this place of judgment so that we don't end up here again.

Well, beginning in verse 6 the Lord then responds to the cries of the people in captivity, and He takes this lesson that is repeated constantly throughout the Bible and applies it to this generation. He says in verse 6, "I removed his shoulders," speaking of Israel, "from the

burden; his hands freed from the baskets. When you were in trouble, I delivered you. I answered you from the secret place of thunder; and then I tested you at the water of Meribah."

Joseph was a friend of Pharaoh's. He brought his family of 70 down to Egypt. Over the next 430 years, they grew to several million. Eventually the Pharaohs didn't take much stock in Joseph's relationship with the children of Israel. The children of Israel grew to where they were a threat. They were treated and mistreated by the nation. They became slaves making bricks. They had brutal taskmasters. At some point they began to pray, "Oh, God, deliver us." And as you read in Acts 7, the sermon that is there, the Lord said, "I've seen what you're going through. I've heard your cry. I'm coming down to help you. I'm sending Moses." And he said it to Moses, "I've heard the people, I've seen their plight. I want to help them and I want to send you to be their help." And Moses was God's hand at work. Let My people go. And you know how the story went. You know, the Pharaoh said no way, I've got them. I'm going to use them. They're mine. And the Lord said, hey, I don't think so. For nine months the plagues fell and God delivered the people. It became a great picture of God bringing you and I out

of sin and out of the dominance of sin in our lives.

I would think that coming out of Egypt would have secured the fact that the nation would be grateful. Who else had ever been delivered like this? Who else had had a God that could make a muscle and have His way and deliver His people? But what you find instead was they didn't just come out rejoicing, they came out complaining. The Lord had answered them, as we read here in verse 7, from heaven itself, from the secret place of thunder. God had made His power known. God had moved on their behalf. I mean, we have communion to remind ourselves of how God has moved on our behalf, so we don't forget, right? But the obligation then is placed on us for God's past mercy. We should respond in kind.

Unfortunately what you find in every place in the scriptures, not only here, is that oftentimes God's people on the receiving end of His goodness act like spoiled kids. They get everything they want and rather than being grateful, they just want more. And the demands rather than -- there's no thanksgiving, there's no gratitude, there's no desire to serve, there's no reciprocal love. It's just bless me today. What have you done for me today? And so the Lord said, I removed

from you the burden. I answered you when you're in trouble. I delivered you from your oppression. And then I tested you. I brought you out into the wilderness, where you're -- the test was, are you going to realize what I've given you.

The word "Meribah" means to strive. You'll find it a couple of times in the scriptures. When the children of Israel first came out to the Negev or to the Sinai, they ran into a place where there wasn't any water, and they rather than looking to the Lord who had brought them this far, or just being able to at least say to one another I'm sure the Lord has a plan, they began to accuse Moses of bringing them out there to die, and began to accuse God of forsaking them. The Lord said to Moses, "Take the rod that I've given you in your hand and smite the rock." Jesus being the rock, we are told in the New Testament, He's the one that was smitten so that we could have living water, His spirit. And Moses did that, and the people got water from the rock. Millions of them drinking water, enough to survive the desert. Imagine. It's a good kind of week for heat to remind us of how hard that must have been.

When you get to Numbers Chapter 20, again they run into a

place where they have the same issue, no water. They begin to gripe. You would think they'd be appreciative. Oh, the Lord can handle this. He's always handled it. Instead they begin to gripe. And it made Moses so mad, they'd been so in his face for so long, that he grabs the rod and he said, "Do I always have to beat on this rock for you?" And he began to just lash away at this stone in anger. And the Lord said, "Hey, Moses. I'm not angry, you are. And because you've misrepresented me, now you won't get to go and lead the children of Israel to the land of promise." The type had been destroyed. It used to be Jesus was One smitten for us, now just call upon His name. One sacrifice for all. But they called that place Meribah, the place of striving. The Lord said here and elsewhere, "I've brought you out into the wilderness to put you to the test. You should know by now that I can be trusted."

Faith that is tried is faith that can be strong. I think if none of us were ever in a position to have our faith tried, we probably would assume that our faith was great. Yeah, I trust the Lord for everything, because I got nothing to trust Him for. But when the pressure is set upon us, now we find out exactly how strong we are or we're not, right? And we learn not to think too highly

of ourselves.

There's scripture in Deuteronomy Chapter 8 that says that the Lord -- He said, "Remember the Lord who brought you through the wilderness those 40 years, to humble you and to test you, so that you might know what was in your heart."

So the whole Psalm speaks of what the Bible talks about, God's faithfulness and the people's lack of it. The lack of gratefulness, the lack of devotion. We just want what we want, but we're not necessarily willing to be changed by what He's done. But these tests revealed their weakness, right? It removed false sense of security. It brought them to a place where they realized what Jeremiah said, "Your heart is desperately wicked. You really can't know it." But God can show it to you. It was why David would write in Psalm 139, "Lord, search me and know me. See if there's anything wicked in me and lead me in the ways of life."

Israel had had such an amazing deliverance. Miraculous in every way. Their God was able, He was strong, capable, dependable, and yet every time at the last little bit of difficulty, they turned. They turned.

Over the years the nation found God to be faithful. He had found them to be unfaithful. Great is our sin; greater is His faithfulness.

So here's His admonition to this generation and to us as well, verse 8, "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me!" Big -- small word, huge impact, if. "If you will listen to Me! There shall be no foreign gods before you; you shouldn't be worshipping any foreign god. Because I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Now, if you'll open up your mouth wide, I'll fill it." Amazing. Delivered from bondage, delivered through the wilderness, delivered every time, and yet somehow there is still this propensity in their hearts to bow their knee to a different god. That's what caused them to fail to enjoy God's goodness. And unfortunately it can be the very thing that causes us to live a life that falls far short of what God would want to do in our life. The Lord was just looking for, and I think rightfully so, allegiance. Here's all that I've done for you. Please be grateful and respond.

Our old nature is always prone to idolatry. Idolatry in its basic form is to replace God with another God, lesser

God, right? I have the Lord, who wants to bless so much, but I'm going to go after pleasure or power or wealth or popularity. I'm going to -- I have another god that I'm going to bow my knees to. And the temptation of the flesh is always that, replace God with something or someone else, even though at best it offers temporary pleasure, and it can never equate to the fact that God gave you eternal life.

It was a miracle that had caused them to be delivered. Notice verse 10, I'm the One who delivered you. Nobody else. You can write over verse 10, hey, who loves you, baby? Because that's what it says. Who saved you? And notice that the Lord's response or His reason for bringing it up is to say, I want to give you more than the bare essentials of deliverance. I want to give you everything I have. Blessed more abundantly, table in the midst of your enemies, anointing your head with oil, cup running over, mouth satisfied with good things so that your youth can be renewed like the eagles. Or what Jesus said in Luke, "Don't be afraid, little flock. It is Your Father's good joy, His pleasure to give you the kingdom."

The problem isn't that God doesn't want to bless you.

The problem is that God's people more often than not have

little appetite for God. If you ever see little birds sitting in a nest when mom brings the worm, and all the mouths wide, give that one to me. There's hunger there. There's an appetite. The Lord's suggestion here is there's no appetite, no real thirsting after, no real anticipation, no desire. You that have children and they're little, when you have to feed them and you give them desert, man, their mouth is open wide. Man, give me more of that. If you ever try to get the vegetables in, you might be wearing them in about 30 seconds. They spit those out. Oh, I don't want any more of that. Open your mouth. I'm not opening my mouth ever again.

No anticipation, no hunger for the Lord. And so, when Jesus said ask and it will be given to you; seek, you'll find; knock, it will be open to you. Because if you seek, you'll find; if you knock, it will open. But you got to have that hunger. We need to have the hunger.

No good thing, we read I think in Psalm 84, just a couple of Psalms up, "No good thing will God withhold from those who walk uprightly." God is honored by the great expectation of His people. We have every reason to serve Him. We have every reason to follow Him. We have absolutely no reason to not follow. And yet He says He

still finds not an anticipatory heart, we almost slough off what He's done.

There are a couple of really good stories that kind of support that in the Old Testament. When Elisha was dying of the disease with which he had gotten sick -- the greatest healer almost in the Old Testament -- Joash, the king, came to him and said, "I'm really worried about being without you. You've always brought God's blessing to me, and we got to fight the Assyrians." And Elisha said, "Well, all right. Take your arrows and shoot them." And he did. And he said, "Now grab the rest of them and beat the ground." And Joash grabbed the arrows and he beat the ground three times and he stopped. And Elisha, sick as he was, got angry. He said, "If you'd have beaten the ground six times, you'd have had complete victory, but no, you showed this lack of ambition. So you're only going to win three battles. The victory is not going to be complete." But the implication was, you don't have much of a heart for this. You're not having much expectation from the Lord. You're not willing to look to Him for full -- you're just not giving it your all.

A few years earlier there was a widow whose husband

obviously had died, and -- but Elisha wasn't aware of it. She had two sons. She was in debt up to her eyeballs. They had taken her sons into slavery to pay the debt. And she came to Elisha just in tears, and said, "Can God help?" And Elisha said, "God can help." He said, "I want you to go into your house and into your neighborhood and find every vessel that's empty, and just bring it into your heart." "Well, I only have one little cup left of oil." He said, "Just get every vessel that you can find." And she went out and gathered some vessels. And they closed the door, and out of this vessel they began to fill the others so that she'd have something to sell to pay off her debt. Eventually Elisha said to her, "Where are the rest of the vessels?" And she goes, "That's it. They're all full." And the oil stopped coming forward. And the same lesson is taught there in II Kings, I think it's chapter -- I want to say it's Chapter 4, but if it isn't, I didn't say it. But the lesson was, look, if you'd have just brought in more vessels, God would have filled them. The expectation was lacking. Or the expectation of the goodness of God, who has proven Himself so much, was not found. Unfortunately that's true in our own heart. It isn't that God can't bless or that He won't bless or that He hasn't blessed, but we respond to His blessings with indifference and our

expectations for Him are very low, and it breaks His heart.

Make me your God and I will fill you. Let me be the only God. What false god has delivered you? I delivered you. Open your mouth, I'll fill it. Why go anywhere else? Look anywhere else? And God wanted His deliverance to motivate His people to an allegiance, but it hasn't taken place.

So He says in verse 11, "But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel wanted nothing to do with -- would have none of Me. So I gave them over to the to their own stubborn heart, so that they could walk in their own counsels." The definition of opening up your mouth wide and filling it was that you would listen to His voice and respond to Him and have His -- He'd be the Lord of your life, the one that delivered you from Egypt. But the Lord said, you didn't want that, so I gave you what you wanted and let you have your own way.

They would not heed His voice there in verse 11 are words of choice, of decision. I don't know how much of a pass you give yourself in your relationship with the Lord and how little time you find for Him, because, life is just

so busy. But they refused to hear His voice. Strange that we could ever come to the conclusion that somehow God's ways are less good for us than our own. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, who sits not in the seat of the scornful, who stands not in the path of sinners, delights himself in the Lord. That's someone who's blessed. Meditates in His word day and night. That's the man who's blessed.

But so often God finds us, the recipients of His goodness, indifferent and without any expectation, and yet if you'll read your Bible, certainly the reward of flesh is emptiness. You're not going to be blessed. Jesus showed up in Nazareth, His hometown, having done glorious things in other places, and then you get to Mark Chapter 6, it says, oh, He could just heal a few sick folks because of the unbelief. It marveled the Lord. It blew His mind. These are people that knew Him well. He'd opened the eyes of the blind and made the lame to walk, delivered them of demon possession. They went, yeah, you know. Yeah, you know what? Look at what He's done. And they turned from Him. They harden their hearts. And notice verse 12, that if that's the path that you're going to take, not listening to Him, even though He has earned the right of your allegiance and

your love, and His promises are far more than He's even been able to deliver into your life, the response was, hey, I just want my way. I'm stubborn in my heart. I have my own counsel.

My dad used to say to me, "Fine. Have it your way." I learned after a while that wasn't good. I thought it was good. Yeah, I'll stay up till 12:00 and eat ice cream every hour -- till you got sick and you couldn't wake up in the morning. He's usually right. Have your own way almost sounds like there's no punishment in that at all. But man, the consequences are horrible. This will be the same generation that just, 1,000 years down the road, will collectively stand outside Pilate's house and yell, "Give us Barabbas. Crucify Jesus." Same group.

How tragic when you have your own way. There is nothing worse than having God say to you, have it your way. Read Romans Chapter 1. It is the argument of man wanting his own way. In verse 25 -- 24, verse 26, verse 28, you will read those same words, and God gave them up, God gave them over, God gave them what they wanted. It describes the descent of man in his heart away from God, becoming captive to his flesh. Horrible. In fact, when Jeremiah came on the scene right before the children of Israel

were going into this Babylonian captivity, the Lord said through Jeremiah Chapter 2, I think verse 17, "Didn't you bring this on yourself? You've forsaken the God who brought you out of Egypt, who had you drinking water out of a rock." Same example is repeated over and over in the scriptures. Your own wickedness is going to have to correct you. Your own backsliding is going to have to rebuke you. You've done an evil thing in forsaking the Lord. Your fear of the Lord's not with you. This is now what you get. Have it your own way. And unfortunately that's so often what you have to say to people today. God's done so much for you, why don't you put Him first? Why don't you get to church more often? Why don't you get your Bible out and read it? Why don't you make your decisions based on what you read there? Why don't you let Him be the Lord? Why do you think you know so much better?

Look at the lament of a brokenhearted father in verse 13. It is a sad pathetic verse. "Oh, if my people would have just listened to me. If they would have just walked in My ways." This is a verse of lost opportunity. God is so reluctant to give you up. He said through Hosea to the people, "How can I give you up, and how can I hand you over? Sympathy is stirred in My heart and My heart

churns for you." I don't want you to go through what you're going through. Oh, if you'd have just -- how many times you say that to your kids, if you'd have just listened, you could have avoided all this turmoil.

It would be horrible to get through things and look back and say, oh, if I'd have only listened, what would the Lord have done? Verse 14 He said, "I would have delivered you from your enemy," in quick order. In verse 15, "I would have humbled your enemies so that even if they didn't believe in the God that you served, they would have pretended to just to stay away from your anger. You would have had the upper hand rather than being dominated by your enemy. I would have given you the finest wheat. Honey out of a rock, I would have satisfied you." You really want life that is worth living and satisfaction, keep the Lord first. But look what you lose by sin. Your protection is stripped away, your witness is nonexistent, and you miss out on the blessings of God. Oh, what might have been.

Paul said in Romans 8, "He that spare not His own son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not freely with Him give us all things?" That's God's heart. But see, that's the battle. You have a Father that wants to dote

over you and spoil you and love you, and all He wants is that you follow and listen and obey; that you keep yourself in a place where God's love can be poured out upon you. You have reason enough to follow Him. You have no reason not to. But it's the lament of the Father in heaven. His heart breaks. Oh, if you'd have just listened. Open your mouth. I will fill it. I'm the One who brought you out. Why can't I get credit? Why can't you give Me that place in your life?

It's the theme of the Bible. God wants to be your God. The false gods want to take His place. Your flesh sides on the sides of the false gods. The battle for you is, is the Lord your Lord or not, or are you just letting Him in 30 minutes on a Sunday? And that's it. Don't bother me with Him the rest of the week. God has so much more. The choice to listen and respond is yours alone, and the consequences will follow. But know God's heart. You can find it in verse 10, you can find it in verse 13, you can find it throughout the scriptures. God wants to bless more than you want to be blessed apparently. Make the right call.