

God's Righteousness in Our Distress

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to his word in Psalm 71 tonight. In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge.! Let me never be put to shame.

Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness.! Turn your ear to me and save me. Be my rock of refuge to which I can always go. Give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

! Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men. For you have been my hope, O sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth.

From birth I have relied on you. You brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you. I have become like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge.

My mouth is filled with your praise. Declaring your splendor all day long. Do not cast me away when I am old. Do not forsake me when my strength is gone.

[1 : 07] For my enemies speak against me. Those who wait to kill me conspire together. They say, God has forsaken him. Pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him.

Be not far from me, O God. Come quickly, O my God, to help me. May my accusers perish in shame. May those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace.

But as for me, I will always have hope. I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure.

I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O sovereign Lord. I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone. Since my youth, O God, you have taught me.

And to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

[2 : 17] Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God. You who have done great things, who, O God, is like you? Though you've made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again.

From the depths of the earth, you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again. I will praise you with a harp for your faithfulness, O my God.

I will sing praise to you with a lyre, O holy one of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you, I whom you have redeemed.

My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long. For those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion. Well, let's hear God's word preached.

Pastor Jason. I want you to think of a time that you were in great distress. Great distress.

[3 : 28] I'm pausing for a moment because I actually really want you to think of a time that you were in great distress. I was saved as a teenager.

And so the first great, great distress of my life was that question of how can I be saved?

That was a very distressful time. I remember praying for months that the Lord would save me.

And he did. He was good. The second great trial of my young faith came when I was probably 17.

And my friend, one of my best friends in high school was a young lady. And she came from sort of a broken home.

[4 : 29] And she just didn't have very good parents to look out at for her. And she was really nice and smart and funny and all the rest. And yet she somehow or other found herself in a relationship with, in Argus terms, was the big bad guy in Argus.

One of them. He was a thug. And so he did what thugs do.

And he was very possessive. Of my friend. And in not good ways. And so it came to a point where I had to sort of like get in his face and tell him off and get him out of there.

Because things were not good. And at the same time, I was working at Subway. And I worked Fridays and Saturdays from 4 to 11.

So that meant that I was there by myself in the store at night in the dark. And this guy lived in town and it's not much for anyone to get to Subway in Argus.

[5 : 40] Anyways, so he had threatened me. And in my own high school mind, this was a very big deal. And I suppose it still would be. And I remember that afternoon before I was going into work that night.

there's no time like distress in order to send you to the word of God, send you praying. And so I'm praying and reading, knowing I have to do this.

I'm not sure what's going to happen at work tonight. And I was reading and trying to find something to find peace and calm and praying about this.

And remember, I'm 17. I don't know the Bible that well. I'm still finding my way around things. And I came to Isaiah chapter 41.10. You don't have to turn there right now. But this verse became such a powerful verse in just my mind and in my heart in those moments.

And this is what it says. So do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

[6 : 49] And it was that verse that got me out the door and got me through work and saw me through that whole experience.

And it was the Lord's promise in that, that I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. So that was one of my great times of distress in my young life.

And it was God's righteous right hand and the promise that I'm going to be with you that got me through that. So what does it feel like to be in distress?

Well, it's a very precarious position, isn't it? It's a very fearful, full of anxiety. I mean, your stomach is churning, your mind is going around and around.

And that's how I felt that afternoon. And if you're thinking of that time of when you were in distress, that's probably how you felt. You've come to the end.

[7 : 51] You don't know what to do. You don't have any ideas. You're afraid. You feel helpless. Now, you know how that feels when you're in distress and anxiety or just being anxious doesn't quite even cover it.

It's, I'm really anxious and I don't know what to do. Overwhelmed. Now, we read Psalm 71 and David is in distress in this Psalm.

He's feeling that feeling that you are hopefully remembering, that anxiety and that overwhelmed feeling. And he's crying out to the Lord, in you, Lord, I've taken refuge.

Rescue me. Be my rock of refuge. Deliver me. Don't cast me away. Don't forsake me. Keep me close. Help me. And this is all too much for him.

And so things are desperate. Things are frightening. Now, Psalm 69 through Psalm 72 are all on this theme of distress.

[9 : 01] And what do you do? And how do you feel in that? And how do you address the Lord in that? And what do you look for in the Lord in that? So, Psalm 69. Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in the miry depths where there's no foothold. That's what distress feels like. That you're now up here. The water is up here. I'm about to die.

This is very frightening. I am in pain and distress, he says. May your salvation, O God, protect me. So, you know what David is feeling?

Do you know what he's going through? Psalm 70. Hasten. Hurry. You ever tell God to hurry? Hurry. Hasten, O God, to save me, O Lord.

Come quickly to help me. I am poor and needy. Come quickly to help me. Oh my God. Help me. We already looked at Psalm 71. Psalm 72 is talking about defending the afflicted of the people.

[10 : 02] The children of the needy. He's saying, crush the oppressor. Says he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. It's these Psalms are all about crying out to the Lord when you're in distress.

When you're in that situation of great fear, great anxiety. And so my question is, is that where you are now?

You've been there. No doubt will be there in the future. Are you there now? In Psalm 71, David is there. He's feeling those feelings.

He's experiencing those emotions. He's looking at the enemies. He's looking at the problems. And it all seems so much. David is there. But what you see in Psalm 71, David has his eyes fastened. And it's like a magnet or something that it keeps on coming right back to this one attribute of God. And I wonder if you saw it. It's repeated several times.

[11:12] This one attribute in particular. And David, as he's feeling all this distress, is now looking to the Lord and he says, God, I know this about you. I know this about you.

And this is what he's counting on. Did you see what it was? In verse 2, rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness.

Verse 15, My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long. Verse 16, I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.

Verse 24, or verse 19, your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Verse 24, my tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long.

Now in Psalm 72, this is actually, it's a different Psalm, it has a different author, but it's sort of the same thing. And Solomon, David's son, is now saying, Lord, make me like you are, as a king.

[12:19] Make me like what kind of king you are. And now, in what way? He says, endow, give, grant to me, grant your king with justice.

O God, the royal son with your righteousness. He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.

The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills of the fruit of righteousness. He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy.

So Solomon is praying, give me your kind of righteousness, God. the kind of righteousness you have. Let me be that kind of king. And what kind of righteousness is he talking about?

To save the children of the needy? To save the afflicted? To rescue those who are in distress? To help those powerfully who are oppressed?

[13:20] He's saying, make me that kind of king. And so what was David's great hope? And what was Solomon's great aspiration? It was, I want to be righteous.

It was God's righteousness. Now that might sound strange to you because what we normally think of in situations of distress is, Lord, help me.

I need your mercy. I need compassion. And that's true. And maybe the last thing that we would pray for is, Lord, be righteous towards me.

Because in those situations we don't feel like God's righteousness is a good thing because we're thinking I'm sinful, I need mercy. And so we normally pray, Lord, have compassion, have mercy on your servant, and those are good things and that's what we say.

But here is something else, and it's not just here. It's actually in a lot of other places where those who are in distress look to God's righteousness.

[14:30] Now, we're saying, and that's what David says in verse 2, God, in your righteousness deliver me. We don't normally think of righteousness that way.

We normally think of righteousness as just not doing sin, not sinning. And so that's what it means to be righteous, is that you don't sin.

And so that's how we normally think about God's righteousness. It's purely in terms of there's no sin in him. There's nothing wrong in what he has done.

And so we think of it purely in the absence of wrong. He does what is just. He doesn't wrong anyone. But when we think about our father's righteousness only in those terms of not doing wrong, we miss.

We don't see, we don't think about his righteousness the way David is thinking about it. Of, Lord, I am in distress, and it's your righteousness that is going to save me.

[15:38] It's your righteousness that's going to help me. so, I just want to show you that there is this whole other side of God's righteousness.

And there's this whole other biblical way of looking at it. It's more, it's not just the absence of wrong, and as we see it, you're going to see that God's righteousness is actually really, really good news. it's even really good news for sinners. It's really good that God and his righteousness is like this.

And so, first I want to show you, we're going to come back to Psalm 71, and we're going to look at it in more detail, but I want to show it to you in human terms, a human example.

And so, turn back in your Bibles to Job, that's the book right before Psalms, Psalms there is Job, and I want you to turn to Job chapter 29. Job 29.

And you remember, Job, in this chapter, or in this book, he's having to defend his righteousness against his three friends, because his three friends think that you're suffering because you've done what is wrong.

[16:56] His three friends are accusing him, Job, you're suffering because you weren't righteous. And Job's answer is, no, that's not it. that's not it.

And I want you to listen to how he defends himself. Listen to how he defends and says, now look, this is my righteousness. And you remember, we saw even this morning, the Lord said about Job, he's blameless and upright.

He's a righteous man. There's no one like Job. So, what did Job's righteousness look like? Well, Job chapter 29 and verse 11.

And we're just going to read through verse 17. And I want you to see what Job's righteousness looked like. Whoever heard me spoke well of me. And those who saw me commended me.

Because I rescued the poor who cried for help. And the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me. I made the widow's heart sing.

[18:03] I put on righteousness as my clothing. Justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind, my feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy.

I took up the case of the stranger. That is the immigrant, the alien. I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.

So what was Job's righteousness? He helped, he rescued people that were in great distress.

The fatherless, the orphan who has no one to protect them, the widow who's now lost all their financial stability, all their financial hope. Job would actually come in and help them and be a father. father. He made widow's heart sing. He says, I put on righteousness as my clothing. So his righteousness was not just not sinning.

[19:10] It was more than that. It was this active pursuit and salvation of those who were in distress. It wasn't just not sinning.

It was an active pursuit of saving those who were in distress. His eyes to the blind, feet to the lame. Now turn over to Job chapter 31.

Job 31. Now Job is still talking and he's still defending himself. In verse 1 you notice that very famous verse, I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully a girl.

So that's how we normally think of righteousness and Job has that. He's saying, I made a commitment. I am not going to sin with my eyes. So that's his righteousness.

But then he goes on and there's all this additional that says that Job says, look at my righteousness. Now look at verse 16.

[20:14] And we're going to just read through verses 23. 16 through 23. If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless, but from my youth, I reared him as would a father, and from my birth, I guided the widow.

If I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing or a needy man without a garment, and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint, for I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor, I could not do such things.

Job says, I saw the distressed, I saw them, and I took action. I saw them in need.

I saw that I had great power to destroy them, but I didn't destroy them. Instead, I clothed them, I fed them, I was a father to them. So, what is righteousness?

What is God's righteousness? It's not just absence of wrong, it's mercy to those who are in distress. It's his going out and seeking and saving those who are in great distress.

[21:49] stress. Now, let's start heading back to Psalm 71. And as you're heading back, I want you to stop at Psalm 51.

So, turn to Psalm 51. And this is a very also a famous psalm, and it's David's psalm of repentance. You remember, he's sinned with Bathsheba, he's killed Uriah, now he's just ignored God for months on end, and Nathan comes and says, you are the man.

In Psalm 51, David responds. And I want you to look at verse 14. Verse 14.

He says, save me from blood guilt, O God, the God who saves me. and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

Now, earlier in Psalm 51, he's asked for mercy, he's asked for compassion, he's asked for forgiveness, but here he says, if you save me, I will sing of your righteousness.

[23 : 12] So, David's looking to God's unfailing love, he's looking to his compassion, he's looking to his mercy, but he's looking more than that. He's saying, Lord, here I am in a great, I am in great distress.

I have done this to myself. This is my sin, this was my action, I brought myself into this place, and now here I am, and Lord, I need saved from blood guilt, because I've done things that are bloody, and I need saved.

Don't put me off, save me, and I will sing of your righteousness. Now, isn't that interesting, and isn't that good news? A part of God's righteousness is saving people in distress, and even the distress of their own sin.

Even the distress that they've done to themselves. Even the distress of they've deserved the exact opposite of salvation. Now, I could show you several other passages, but turn back again to Psalm 71, and I want you to notice again, as we read through it, the things that are connected and tied in David's mind to God's righteousness.

What kind of words does he parallel it and uses synonyms? So, back in Psalm 71, verse 2, deliver me in your righteousness.

[24 : 42] So, what is his righteousness going to look like? It's going to look like deliverance for David. Verse 15, my mouth will tell of your righteousness of your salvation all day long.

In Hebrew poetry, there's often a parallel of synonyms where the poet will say one thing one way and then he'll say the same thing in another way and that's what you have here.

It's God's righteousness and his salvation are put as synonyms. To put it simply, when God saves us, he's showing us his righteous character.

Verse 16, it's God's mighty acts, his righteousness and his marvelous deeds, they're all put together. His marvelous acts, his mighty deeds for men, his righteousness all put together.

And then in verse 19, he just cries out, Lord, your righteousness reaches to the skies. Verse 15 says, I can't measure it. Your salvation, your righteousness, your ability, your willingness to save those in distress, it reaches to the skies.

[25 : 53] I look up and it's vast, high soaring above. So our God is truly a saving God. saving those who are in distress.

And so that's who he is, the God who saves. And I don't want to put brackets or limits on this. so whatever your distress is, whatever your distress is, maybe it's at work with certain people, maybe it's a financial problem, maybe it's a relational problem with children or moms and dads or husbands and wives and now here you are in your great distress.

So as you're back against the wall and you're saying, I don't know what to do. This is bad and I don't know what to do. I don't know, I don't know where to turn and I here I am weak and I'm needy and what do you do?

Well, here is your God. That's what Psalm 71 is teaching us. Here is your God. his righteousness reaches to the skies.

His ability, his willingness, his eagerness to save, it goes to the skies. You call upon a father who moves with great power to deliver those who are in distress.

[27 : 30] And so are you poor in spirit? That's one of the signs of being in the kingdom. That's what it looks like to receive the kingdom. You're poor in spirit. You look and you're spiritually bankrupt.

You don't have what it takes. You don't have anything left. Your spiritual bank account is empty. Your spiritual gas tank is running on fumes. You're poor.

Spiritually poor. So think about if you're physically poor, you're like scraping together the quarters and the pennies in order to put into your gas tank. Is that how you feel?

Spiritually that way? Maybe you're in desperate physical need, desperate spiritual need, desperate financial need, and I just look up.

Look at your God. He's mighty to save. This is his righteousness. This is part of who he is. This is part of his character.

[28 : 28] He's a saving God. Israel was enslaved in Egypt. Their whips, the whips were on their backs, their chains were on their arms and on their wrists, their babies, their children are dying.

Moses is saved. Doesn't say any others were. Children were dying. I guess the midwives were rescuing them, weren't they? The point was, Pharaoh said, I will not let these people go.

But God came with power. Not word alone. Pharaoh didn't listen to God's word. And that was the problem. God said, let my people go. And Pharaoh said, who is this God that I should listen to him? And so when he wouldn't respond to the word, God came with power. And so there were gnats and boils and blood and then death. And he set his distressed people, free. You could read about that in Exodus of how they're groaning in captivity and the Lord comes with great power and sets them free.

[29 : 38] Now, 400 years later, there about Samuel is now standing in front of the people of Israel and he says, I'm going to tell you of all God's righteous acts.

That's how he says it. And then he begins, he traces Israel's history in Egypt, and then he traces Israel's history through the time of the judges and their dealings with the Philistines and there was Sisera and all of these enemies that were oppressing them.

and what Samuel was saying is, you want to see the righteous acts of God? And it was salvation, salvation, salvation, rescue.

Now, Samuel took Israel to task. This history lesson had a point and the point was this. Now, another king has come against them and they didn't trust him.

they didn't trust their savior. You turned against him, he says, you didn't believe that he could save you. So how about you?

[30 : 54] Are you in distress? Will you trust him? Will you lean into him? So you're in great distress. Will you now look to the God whose righteousness goes up to the skies?

he has power, he's willing, he's ready, he's able to save. And Israel didn't believe. When their times of distress came, they continually turned their back on God.

Israel didn't believe. Let's believe. Let's believe instead. So don't give in to despair.

to say that we're stuck and this is the way it's going to be. Like, here I am in Egypt and I'm going to be here forever. Don't give in to despair.

Don't stay silent. Jesus, son of David, have pity on me. Think of how many times Jesus heard those words.

[32 : 04] Walking through his life, people crying out to him. they had the good sense to see salvation and call upon it. Call upon him. And so that's what you see in Psalm 71.

That's what you see in Psalm 69. Psalm 70 is these people are saying, rescue, deliver, I'm in distress. And they're opening their mouth and they're speaking to their God and they know they're going to be heard and they're waiting for an answer.

And then they say, my tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long. So don't give in to despair. Don't be silent. Don't give in to fear.

God's righteousness reaches to the sky. So what do we have to be afraid of? What possible danger is so great that our God can't deliver us?

What possible distress is too much that he is not able to rescue us? He is mighty to save.

[33 : 07] His power, his salvation is as great as his power. Last, don't lie down and die in your sin.

We started with just where I, that first great crisis of what do I do with my sin? How can I be saved? And I called upon the Lord.

And I want to say, if you aren't a Christian, don't lay down, lie down, and die in your sin. Because maybe you say, my sin is too great. I've waited too long.

My soul is too dead. Things are too hopeless for me. I have tried, and I have tried, and nothing has happened. But isn't this the gospel that we preach?

In the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. A righteousness from God is revealed. A salvation.

[34 : 13] A righteousness, and it's all about Jesus. It's all about Jesus. He's mighty to save. what is the gospel?

It's the power of God. Power. Not mere words. It's word, but it's power. It's the power of God to save.

God's righteousness. And it's a righteousness that is given to us by faith. Why do we call out?

Why do we cry out? We do it because we're simply in need. We need help. We need rescued. And so we call out.

And that calling out, that saying, there's hope there, there's help there. That's what faith is. It's looking to God, looking to Jesus and saying, he can save me.

[35 : 15] So you feel your need of him. You see your desperate need and you turn to him. And that's what faith is. And so I'm saying, don't lie down in your sin and just die.

Don't just settle for the situation. Look to Jesus. He's God's righteousness. He's God's salvation. He's our righteousness. He's our salvation. And so cry out to the God who saves.

And you're crying out to the God who, who, this is his very nature. This is who he is. He's the God that saves. He's the saving God. And so you cry, be my savior.

Be my savior. If you're saving God, then be my own personal savior. Be my own personal savior. Do this for me.

You're saving others. Save me. That's faith. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that this is who you are.

[36 : 20] And I thank you that around this room right now there are people in distress and that things are not hopeless because you are who you are. Mighty to save.

Full of power. Ready to rescue. Ready to step in. Ready to sustain. Ready to help. Ready to encourage. ready to take away the burdens or ready to give strength to carry them.

But you are not standing on the sidelines unable to help. But your righteousness reaches to the skies.

We are like those widows and orphans. We're spiritually impoverished. We're needy people. So thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are the perfect, mighty savior for us.

You are God's righteousness for us. So thank you. Please help us to trust you. Help us to lean in and not give in to despair, not give in to fear, not give in to unbelief, but to open our mouths and open our hearts and cry out to you in our times of need.

[37 : 34] And thank you that you will hear us and we will sing of your righteousness all the days of our lives. Pray this in Jesus mighty name.

Amen.