

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 17,

Communal Lament – Psalm 44

20-min. Podcast Audio Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

All right, let's jump into this deep dive. Today, we are going to tackle Psalm 44. This should be an interesting one.

Yeah, it's sometimes called A Prayer for Martyrs, which is... It's a heavy title. Is, yeah. And you know, we got this lecture from Dr. Bruce Waltke that you sent in that I thought was just so insightful.

I mean, he just really digs into the meaning and the structure of this psalm. And I think it's going to help us maybe even navigate some of the tough things that we face in our own lives. Yeah.

It's amazing how these ancient prayers can still speak to us today. You know, thousands of years later, they still resonate with our experiences. It really is.

And it's interesting because, like, you know, when you read through the psalms, you know, you kind of get the sense that they're, you know, poems and songs and, you know, words of praise and worship. But like lament psalms, these psalms that deal with suffering and pain, they make up like a third of the book. A third.

Yeah. It's a significant portion. Yeah.

It's like, wow. And it makes you realize that suffering is not just this like side note in the spiritual life. Yeah.

You know, it's not something we can just ignore or pretend doesn't exist. It's like Professor Mobley said, suffering is not marginal to the spiritual life. I like that.

Yeah. It's woven into the very fabric of our existence. Even from the beginning, the very first story in the Bible, the story of Abel, it's about undeserved suffering and martyrdom.

It's true. And then you see this theme recurring throughout Scripture and history. Good people facing hardship and persecution.

It makes you wonder, you know, why is that? Yeah. It's a question we all grapple with, I think. Maybe Psalm 44 can give us some insights.

Okay. So let's dive in. The psalm starts off in verses one through eight with this really strong sense of confidence and praise.

The psalmist is clearly grounded in history and scripture. He's drawing strength from stories like Joshua and the Israelites conquering the promised land. Yeah.

It's like he's reminding himself and anyone listening, look, I know you've come through before. You've been faithful to your people throughout history. We have all these stories to remind us of your power and your love.

So it's like looking back on those times you made it through when you thought you wouldn't, like you came out on the other side. Exactly. We all have those stories, those experiences that shape our understanding of who God is and what he's capable of.

And I bet those stories become even more important when we hit those really rough patches in life. You know, when things are just dark, and we don't know what to do or where to turn. Absolutely.

It's like having this reservoir of hope to draw on, you know, when your current circumstances are screaming that God's not there, that he doesn't care. You can look back at those times when he did come through, when he was faithful, and that can give you the strength to keep going. That's a good word.

But then in verses nine through 16, the tone just shifts dramatically. Yeah, you're right. It's like walking into a different room.

Exactly. We encounter this raw emotion, this feeling of defeat and humiliation. He cries out, "You have rejected us and humbled us.

You gave us up to be devoured like sheep. You have made us a byword among the nations. This isn't just disappointment.

This is gut-wrenching pain and confusion. It's a lament, a raw outpouring of grief and anguish. And yet, even in the midst of this intense lament, he never questions God's sovereignty.

So he's acknowledging that God is still in control, even when he doesn't understand why things are happening the way they are. Exactly. He doesn't say, God, you've lost control.

Instead, he says, God, I don't understand why this is happening, but I know you're still on the throne. It's a tough concept, though, isn't it? This idea of God's sovereignty. I mean, if God is in control, why is there so much suffering in the world? It's the age-old question, right? Dr. Waltke uses this really helpful analogy in his lecture.

He talks about flying a plane through the clouds. You lose sight of the ground. You can't see where you're going.

And it could be pretty terrifying, but the pilot knows they have to rely on their instruments. They have to trust the compass, even when they can't see the destination. So our faith is like that compass.

Even when we can't see what God's doing, we can trust that he has a plan and that he's guiding us. Precisely. And then in verses 17 through 22, the psalmist shifts again, this time from lament to protest.

So he's saying, wait a minute, we didn't do anything to deserve this. He's bringing up the issue of deserved versus undeserved suffering. Exactly.

He's adamant. All this came upon us, though we had not forgotten you. We had not been false to your covenant.

It's a cry of injustice. It's like, hey, we've been faithful. We've been trying to follow you, and this is what we get.

Yeah. It's that feeling of dissonance, that gap between what we believe should happen and what actually happens. And it's in that gap, I think, that faith is truly tested.

Because it would be easier if bad things only happened to bad people. Right. If we could always draw a straight line between our actions and our consequences.

But life's not like that. Nope. It's messy and complicated.

And sometimes bad things happen to good people. And that's when we have to wrestle with the question of why. And then in verses 23 through 26, we see this raw plea for God's intervention.

Awake, Lord, why do you sleep? Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? It's such a vulnerable cry. It's like he's bearing his soul before God. And it's a reminder that prayer isn't about pretending everything's OK or trying to impress God with our eloquence.

It's about being honest with him about our pain, our doubts, and our fears. It's about bringing our whole selves to him, warts and all. But it's also wrestling with that feeling of God's hiddenness, isn't it? That sense of being alone, like God is distant or silent.

It's a common experience in times of suffering. But even in those moments, the psalmist shows us that we can still cry out to God. We can express our doubt, our anger, our confusion, and know that he hears us.

Now, here's where it gets really interesting. Dr. Waltke points out this cool thing about the structure of the psalm itself. He says it follows this pattern of 10 lines, then 8, then 6, then 4. Like a pyramid.

Yeah. He compares it to a ziggurat, those ancient Mesopotamian temples built like stepped pyramids. I had no idea.

Isn't it fascinating? It is. And he suggests that the structural detail might actually point to something really profound. He says that even when our lives feel totally chaotic and unpredictable, like they're just spiraling out of control, there's this underlying order and purpose orchestrated by God.

So it's not just random suffering. Exactly. This psalm is reminding us that faith isn't about having all the answers.

It's about trusting in God's plan, even when we don't understand it. It's about believing that even in the midst of the chaos, there's a bigger picture that we can't always see, but that God is in control of. Like the psalmist, even in the middle of all this pain and confusion, he's still creating something beautiful and structured.

He hasn't lost his ability to think or compose. It's a reminder that even in the darkest of times, God's presence is still there, offering stability and order. It's amazing.

And then to top it all off, Dr. Waltke calls this a prayer for martyrs. And that really makes you think about the people who are facing extreme persecution, even death, for their faith. It makes it all the more real, doesn't it? It's not just some abstract theological concept.

It's about real people facing real suffering. And we know that those early Christians were deeply familiar with the psalms. They found comfort and strength in these ancient prayers.

They were praying these words as they faced persecution and martyrdom. It makes you wonder, how does knowing that others have walked this path of suffering before us, how does that impact our own faith and our own understanding of what it means to follow Jesus? Yeah, it's a powerful question. It makes you think about how we can draw strength and encouragement from the stories of those who have gone before us, those who have endured suffering and emerged with their faith intact.

It's like they're saying, hey, we've been there. We know what it's like. And we made it through.

You can too. Okay, so I think we've covered a lot of ground here. Maybe we should take a break and then come back and explore some of these ideas a little bit further.

That sounds good to me. Yeah, it's like their stories give us permission to struggle, to be honest about the pain and the doubt. It's like they're saying, it's okay to not have it all figured out.

We didn't either, but we held on to faith, and you can too. Yeah, and something else that strikes me about this psalm is that it's not just one person crying out to God. It's a group of people, a whole community sharing their pain and seeking solace together.

You're right. It highlights the communal aspect of suffering and faith. We're not meant to go through trials alone.

We need each other, and we need God. Even though the psalm describes a very specific situation, it speaks to this universal human need to connect with others, especially when we're hurting. Absolutely.

We need that sense of belonging, that shared experience. That's where we find comfort and strength. Okay, so this might sound like kind of a dumb question, but something's been bugging me.

What's that? The psalm doesn't really have a happy ending, does it? I mean, the psalmist's situation isn't magically resolved at the end. We're left hanging a bit, which in a way feels a lot like real life. You're right.

It's not a happily ever after kind of story. And that can be unsettling, especially when we're longing for answers and solutions. We want that nice, neat resolution where everything wraps up, and all the loose ends are tied up.

Yeah. Our human brains crave closure, but sometimes we don't get it. At least not in this lifetime.

I guess I'm just so used to those stories where good triumphs over evil and everything works out in the end. But you're right. Life isn't always like that.

It's messy. It's unpredictable. And sometimes we have to wait.

Trust that God's working even when we can't see it. And sometimes the answer might not come in the way we expect or even in our lifetime. That's right.

But that doesn't mean God hasn't heard our cries or that he doesn't care. So it's about holding on to faith even when we don't have all the answers, even when we're surrounded by darkness and uncertainty. Exactly.

It's about living in that tension between what we know to be true about God and what we experience in the world. And that can be a really hard place to be. It can.

But it's also where faith is truly forged in the fires of suffering and doubt. Now, going back to Dr. Waltier's lecture, he calls this a prayer for martyrs. What does that mean to you? What does it mean to pray as a martyr? Well, when I think about martyrs, I think about those who are willing to suffer, even die, for what they believe in.

People like the early Christians who faced incredible persecution for their faith. And we know those early Christians were deeply familiar with the Psalms. They found comfort and strength in these ancient prayers.

Absolutely. And I think for them, praying as a martyr meant clinging to hope, even when everything around them was falling apart. It's like they were saying, God, I don't understand why this is happening, but I trust you.

I believe you're with me, even in this darkness. And that's a message that still resonates with us today. We might not be facing literal martyrdom, but we all go through seasons of suffering, seasons where our faith is tested and our hope feels fragile.

So maybe Psalm 44 is giving us a model for how to pray in those difficult seasons. It's teaching us to be honest with God about our pain, to acknowledge our confusion and frustration, and to hold on to that belief that even in the midst of suffering, God is still present and working in our lives. It's not about pretending we have it all figured out.

It's about bringing our raw emotions to God, trusting in His sovereignty and finding comfort in the knowledge that we're not alone in this journey. But here's something I've been thinking about. We also have the benefit of hindsight.

This song is in the Bible because we know God eventually answered, even if the psalmist didn't see it in his lifetime. That's an important point. We're looking back at this song from a place of historical distance.

We know that God's people endured, and their faith ultimately triumphed over suffering. So it's a reminder that faith requires perseverance and trust in God's timing. And it can give us hope that even when things seem bleak, God is still working, even if we can't see the results right away.

So even though the psalm ends with a question mark, we know there's an answer. Exactly. The story doesn't end with Psalm 44.

It continues throughout history, through the lives of countless believers who have faced hardship and found strength in their faith. That's encouraging. It makes me think about how I approach my own struggles.

Do I allow myself to be honest with God about my pain and confusion? Do I trust His timing even when it feels like He's silent or distant? Those are good questions to reflect on. I think Psalm 44 invites us to examine our own hearts, to consider how we respond to suffering, and to deepen our trust in God's unwavering faithfulness. Now, we've talked a lot about the communal aspect of the psalm, the idea that we're not meant to go through trials alone.

I'm curious: how do you see that playing out in your own life? How do you find support and encouragement from other believers when you're going through tough times? Well, for me, it's about being vulnerable with my community, sharing my struggles with trusted friends and mentors who can offer prayer, encouragement, and a listening ear. It's like building a network of supportive people who can walk alongside you in those dark valleys and remind you that you're not alone. Exactly.

And sometimes just knowing that someone else understands what you're going through can make all the difference. Now, besides the communal aspect of this song, I'm also struck by the sheer honesty of the psalmist's prayer. He doesn't sugarcoat anything.

He's raw, vulnerable, and even a little bit angry. Yeah, he holds nothing back. And I think that's one of the most powerful things about this psalm.

It gives us permission to be real with God. Because sometimes we try to present this perfect, polished version of ourselves to God, like we have to have it all together before we can approach him. We put on this facade, like we have to earn his love or approval.

But this psalm shows us that we can come to God just as we are, with all our messy emotions, our doubts, our fears. We don't have to pretend; we can be authentic. And God can handle our honesty.

Oh, absolutely. In fact, I think he welcomes it. He wants us to come to him with our whole hearts, not just the parts we deem acceptable or presentable.

And maybe that's where true healing and transformation begin, when we stop pretending and start being real with ourselves and with God. I think you're right. It's in those moments of raw honesty that we open ourselves up to God's grace and power.

Okay, so we've talked about the pain, the confusion, the plea for God's intervention. But I'm also curious about the moments of hope in this psalm. The glimmers of light that shine through the darkness.

What are some of the things that give you hope even when you're walking through a difficult season? Well, you know, for me, it's often the small things. A beautiful sunset, a kind word from a friend, a moment of peace in the midst of chaos. Those little reminders of God's goodness and beauty can help sustain me when things feel overwhelming.

It's like those moments where you remember that there's more to life than just the pain and struggle you're currently experiencing. Exactly. And those moments can come from anywhere.

Yes. Nature, from relationships, from unexpected acts of kindness. It's like we're all connected in this web of life.

And even in the darkest of times, those connections, those threads of love and compassion can help hold us together. They remind us that we're not alone and that there's always reason to hope. Yeah, and it's like, you know, even in the middle of all this pain and confusion and questioning, there's still this underlying current of faith.

Like the psalmist never completely loses sight of who God is. Right. And I think that's so important for us today.

We live in a world where it's so easy to get discouraged and lose hope. It really is. And so maybe Psalm 44 is this reminder that faith isn't about having all the answers or pretending that everything's okay.

You know, it's... It's more about being honest with God about our struggles. Yeah. And trusting his sovereignty, even when it doesn't make sense.

Even when we don't understand. Yeah. And just clinging to that hope, even when we feel like giving up.

It's like that image of the ziggurat that we talked about earlier. Even though life can feel so chaotic and unpredictable, there's this underlying order and purpose that God has orchestrated. Yeah, you might not always see it, but it's there.

And that's where faith comes in, right? It is. It's about trusting the architect, even when we can't see the blueprint. I like that.

Okay, so as we kind of wrap up here, what would you say are some of the key takeaways from Psalm 44? What are some truths to live by that we can glean from this ancient prayer? Well, I think one of the biggest takeaways is that, you know, suffering is just part of the human experience. It's not something to be ashamed of or avoided. It's something that we can bring to God.

Yeah. Wrestle with it and ultimately, you know, find redemption through it. And it's okay to be honest with God about our pain and our confusion.

Right, we don't have to pretend to have it all together. And even when we feel like God is distant or silent, we can still trust in his sovereignty. We can believe that.

Yeah. He's working behind the scenes, even when we can't see it. And we don't have to go through it alone.

No, we need each other. We need the support of our community to help carry us through those dark times. It's like, you know, as we were talking about earlier, this Psalm, it's a communal lament.

It's a group of people crying out to God together. They're finding strength and solace in their shared experience. So maybe Psalm 44 isn't so much about finding all the answers, but it's more about learning to live with the questions.

I think so. Yeah. It's about embracing that tension.

You know, that tension between what we know to be true about God and what we experience in the world. Yeah. And I think it's in that tension that our faith is really tested and refined.

Yeah. Well, it's been really great diving deep into Psalm 44 with you. Thanks for helping us unpack all this.

Oh, it's been a pleasure. I feel like I have a much better understanding of this prayer now. I'm glad to hear that.

And to everyone listening, thanks for joining us on this deep dive. We hope this has given you something to think about, you know, as you navigate your own journey of faith and resilience. And we'll see you next time.