

## HOPE IN DESPAIRING TIMES (Ps. 102)

The opening Sunday of a new year encourages us to look forward, and also, to give thanks to God for His presence with us during the previous year. ... This morning though, we wakened up to news of another Islamic attack in which thirty-nine people were killed celebrating the new year in Istanbul. Also, when we consider how the Christmas week began ... with the murder of the Russian ambassador to Turkey and the murders of the twelve people in Berlin ... and when we listen to some politicians speaking about how dark it has been for the UK to have voted to exit from the EU ... and for others in the US who are not looking forward to Donald Trump's inauguration as President. ... Just yesterday, Sky News did a piece on famous people who had died during 2016, - it was all rather morbid. ...

I have entitled our study this morning, "Hope in Despairing Times", and we are turning across to Psalm 102 which belongs to a section of the psalms known as the 'Messianic Psalms'. They each prophetically relate to some aspect of the life of the Messiah, and they contain verses which are quoted or referred to in the New Testament.

Psalm 102 also belongs to another group of psalms known as the Penitential Psalms. These are sorrowful psalms which deal with the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC by King Nebuchadnezzar. Their main theme is the people's contrition for being disobedient to God, which ultimately brought about their seventy-years captivity in Babylon.

It is generally thought Jeremiah wrote Ps. 102, to assure the people.

The psalm, - very possibly written by Jeremiah, - was written to assure the Jews God had not abandoned their nation. There are a number of ways we could study it, for example, we could divide it like this ... **[Desolation]**, Ps. 102:1 *A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee.* **<sup>2</sup>** Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily. **[Desperation]** **<sup>3</sup>** For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. **<sup>4</sup>** My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. **<sup>5</sup>** By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. **<sup>6</sup>** I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. **<sup>7</sup>** I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top. **[Devastation]** **<sup>8</sup>** Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. **[Disgraced]** **<sup>9</sup>** For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, **[Despondent]** **<sup>10</sup>**

Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down. <sup>11</sup> My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. **[Destroyed]**

We could then consider how the psalmist looks towards His **Deliverer**, <sup>12</sup> But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations. **[Unchanged]** <sup>13</sup> Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. **[Undefeatable]** <sup>14</sup> For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. <sup>15</sup> So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. **[Unequaled]** <sup>16</sup> When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. <sup>17</sup> He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. **[Unhindered]** <sup>18</sup> This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD. <sup>19</sup> For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth; <sup>20</sup> To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death; <sup>21</sup> To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem; <sup>22</sup> When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. **[Unrivaled]** <sup>23</sup> He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. <sup>24</sup> I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations.

And then, in the final section, we have **Deliverance**, <sup>25</sup> Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. **[His Permanence]** <sup>26</sup> They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: **[His Power]** <sup>27</sup> But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. **[His Preeminence]** <sup>28</sup> The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee. **[His Purpose]**

For many years, the prophets had been warning the people concerning their attitude towards God. They had treated His goodness abysmally, and, as a consequence, they faced severe chastisement. Despite their prevailing stubbornness and unfaithfulness, God continued to show grace towards them ... until they arrived at the point where He would take no more!

However, before this all happened, - i.e. before God's judgments came upon them, with Sennacherib in the north and Nebuchadnezzar in the south, - the people had convinced themselves God would not act in any way against them! They were His special people ... He would never allow them to be overrun by the enemy, nor allow their beloved Jerusalem to be captured, or His temple to

be destroyed. ... God would never do *that* to them! ... Well, that is where they were wrong!

Instead of the Lord blessing and protecting them, - as if He *owed* it to them, - He opened the floodgates of His wrath upon them and taught them He will not be mocked. His people are His legacy on earth, and their priority is holiness and separation ... to be set apart unto Him.

The privileges they despised ought to have been a pleasure for them to uphold. He had blessed them by choosing them out of all the nations, and He had given them laws to advance righteousness and well-being among their people. But they considered the worship of God to be a burden, and to be restrictive ... they felt it held them back because they wanted to live like the other nations. ... And when they refused to abide by God's law, He chastened them by sending them into captivity, to become slaves to the Babylonians. God said to them, "You want to live *like* them ... Well, you go and live *with* them, in exile, as their captives!" ... And He handed His beloved people over to the ungodly, - the northern ten tribes were taken off into captivity in Assyria (721 BC), and the southern two tribes to Babylon in 586 BC ... and they became "afflicted" and "overwhelmed", and crying (v.1). ... As we say, "you never miss the water till the well runs dry", and that is how it was for the Israelites when they couldn't see the Lord any longer, nor hear His voice (v.2). Their world fell apart (v.3-7), and their enemies gloated over them (v.8,9). ... And the Jews came to understand God was judging them because they had offended Him (v.10,11).

...

Then we come to the 'But' in v.12 which marks a change for the psalmist took his eyes away from the horror and looked towards the throne in Heaven, and the One seated upon it. When He focussed upon God, he began to see the picture much more clearly, <sup>16</sup> **When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.** <sup>17</sup> **He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.** ... Beyond any shadow of a doubt, he realised how, - spiritually-speaking, - the society in Jerusalem had fallen apart ... But, despite his nation's unfaithfulness, God had not changed ... and that was where Jeremiah saw the hope of His people for the future, - his people would be restored to Zion. ... <sup>21</sup> **To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem;** <sup>22</sup> **When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD.** ... That was God's plan for His people!

The psalmist was being shown how God is far above the strife and the turmoil of this world, and yet He hears the groanings, - the prayers, - of His people (v.19,20) ... It was how the writer to the Hebrews also expressed it, **Heb. 4:14** Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. **15** For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

And the psalmist was realising how God works for His own purposes, **Ps. 102:23** He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. ... The *Tanakh* Hebrew Scriptures translates this verse, “He drained my strength in mid-course. He shortened my days”. ... He intervened, and it felt as if my world was falling apart ... but when I looked up and looked to Him, **24** I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations ... and He answered by showing me His unsurpassing glory, **25** Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. **26** They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: **27** But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. ... And, in v.28, the Deliverer promises **Deliverance** for His people, **28** The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee

From **Pleading** (v.1, Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee) to **Praise** (v.28 he children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee) ... From **Trouble** (v.2 Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble) to **Triumph** (v.21 To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem) ... From **Groaning** (v.5 By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my ski) to **Glory** (v.16 When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory). ... That is how the psalmist was trusting for out of his *affliction* (v.10 Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down) he saw more of the Lord, and the *affliction* turned into *adoration* (v.12 But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations), and by the time he comes to the close of his psalm it was excited *anticipation* (v.28 their seed shall be established before thee).

So, there are many different ways we could come to this psalm but, for a few moments, let's apply these words to the from a Messianic perspective ... to how it relates to our Saviour. It can simply be divided into two sections,

1. The Anguish of the Saviour (v.1-24) ... and ...
2. The Answer from His Father (v.25-28).

Briefly, the first section begins with the title, <sup>1</sup> A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. It continues in this heavy theme with imagery that is particularly burdensome. However, in complete contrast is the confidence that springs from out of the second section, <sup>25</sup> Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. <sup>26</sup> They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: <sup>27</sup> But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. <sup>28</sup> The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

In fact, you will recognise those words for they are quoted in Hebrews, **Heb. 1:10** And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: <sup>11</sup> They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; <sup>12</sup> And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail ... thus making this a Messianic psalm. ... Let's amplify these thoughts a little ...

**The Anguish of the Saviour** ... The words of the Psalmist point forward to the Lord Jesus ... Even before He was nailed to the cross, our Saviour was greatly distressed in the Garden of Gethsemane, **Lk. 22:44** And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ... He was 'suffering', even before He was nailed to the cross. ...

There are two types of suffering, - there is torture, inflicts excruciating pain on the body and there is torment, which inflicts the mind ... and it was the mind which was under attack in the Garden of Gethsemane for Jesus knew what lay before Him, as the writer to the Hebrews described, **Heb. 5:7** Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; <sup>8</sup> Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

It was a very personal and inner anguish, endured by the obedient Son Who was devoted to His Father's will ... and it was the Father's will, - from before creation, - to bruise His Son, and put Him to grief ... and to make His soul an offering for sin to justify the many, and to bear their sins. Calvary required obedience to the point of death ... It extends beyond the scope of any of us to understand the anguish and misery, distress and sorrow, affliction and suffering

our Saviour experienced for us. ... You can just hear Him crying out helplessly to His Father, **Ps. 102:2** Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble ... **3** ... my bones are burned as an hearth. **4** My heart is smitten ... **5** By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin ... I'm alone and abandoned, **6** I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. **7** I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top. ... He is surrounded by hatred and opposition, **8** Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. ... And He is **11** withered like grass.

That was our Jesus on the cross. On this first day of a new year, how indebted we are to Him for our salvation! ... As the hymn writer wrote, "The debt I owe, I ne'er could repay". ... He became the Man of Sorrows, for our sakes. He suffered and died alone, *for our sakes*.

But, even in His death, the psalmist saw beyond the grave, **13** Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion. ... **16** When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. ... The cross was necessary for it was the place Jesus sealed my pardon. His 'stamp' of completion was applied to render me no longer guilty in the courtroom of God's justice. God's Son paid the price *in full* His Father demanded for my redemption ... "O, what a Saviour that He died for me! From condemnation He hath made me free ... All my iniquities on Him were laid, All my indebtedness by Him was paid". ... **The Anguish of the Saviour** ...

And in the final four verses (v.25-28), we have **The Answer from His Father** ... Jesus knew "My Father planned it all" for His Father spoke, **25** Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. **26** They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: **27** But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.

... That is Jesus ... Before time began, before He laid the foundations of the earth, and before He put in place the stars and the planets. Yes, as He says in v.26, there is coming a day when what He has created will perish ... but God our Saviour will endure for ever, **27** But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end ... **Heb. 13:8** Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Indeed, the world is 'wearing itself out', - 'waxing old like a garment', as the psalmist described, - or as Paul put it, **Rom. 8:22** For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain [*συνωδίνω birth pains*] together until now. **23** And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves

groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.  
 24 For we are saved by hope ... our hope which is the appearing of the Lord when He returns for His people.

People can say whatever they like about you, as a Christian ... Many have no interest in what you say, and no interest in the Gospel ... and they want rid of it all. After a while, it can become so draining and so discouraging, and it could sap you of your spiritual energy until you feel there is no point in standing up for what you believe. But as Christians, we have God's Word and it shows us how God has a plan of victory for His people. ... And we see here in this psalm that it was only when the psalmist looked upwards and *realised* God, that he *viewed* the fuller picture. ... It's like as the psalmist says elsewhere, **Ps. 100:3** *Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

The Shepherd is coming back for His sheep. He knows where every one of them is, and He will gather them all in. ... And yes, like the psalmist, you might sometimes feel exhausted, but we have this great promise, **Ps. 102:28** *The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*

And it is with those thoughts in our mind, I trust we shall take our fellowship into this year ... The chorus says,

I'm in his hands, I'm in his hands;  
 Whate'er the future holds I'm in his hands,  
 The days I cannot see Have all been planned for me;  
 His way is best, you see; I'm in his hands.

Jesus has died on the cross to set us free ... He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, where He is waiting to come back and receive us unto Himself forever. Our whole future is in His care, and that means we have gone from being '*afflicted*' (v.1) to being *accepted* in the beloved ... *established* among the children of God (v.28). Amen.