

When I'm 64

Psalm 71:1-24

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I'd invite you to turn with me to the Psalms, to the seventy-first Psalm, which is the penultimate psalm in the Second Book of the Psalms. This is a Psalm for old age. Now, don't take offense! I'm not setting an exact date on when old age is. It's looking older and older to me, as I grow older myself. This is a psalm of old age. This psalmist is looking back on a life in which he can testify to the fact that the Lord has been there for him since his birth. He cannot remember a day when he didn't know the Lord; he cannot remember a day when he didn't need the Lord; he cannot remember a day when he didn't rely on the Lord; and he cannot remember a day when the Lord failed him. But he's still got troubles, and so he's looking back on the whole of a life lived with God, but it's been a life filled with troubles. And you know what? His troubles aren't abating in old age. Perhaps we dream of troubles going away in old age, but those of you who are there, or who are coming close, and who are passing through it, can attest that troubles are there just as they are when we are young. And so this psalmist finds himself crying out to the same God to whom he has been crying out for years. And he finds that God sufficient, and that God worthy of praise. Surely there's a word for all of us.

And I want to say especially to the young people tonight, you know, when we are young we think that old age will never come. God grant, young people, that it will come to you, unless the Lord tarries. Grant that you would walk with Him from your earliest days, and know Him in your last days, even to the day of your death. But old age will come, unless the Lord tarries or the Lord cuts your numbers short. And that means that now, in the days of our youth, those are the days to prepare for the days of old age. Bear that in mind, dear young friends, as we hear together God speak to us in this psalm, this song, of old age. This is the word of God. Before we read it, let's pray.

Our heavenly Father, we bless You for Your word. We bless You for the Lord Jesus Christ, the word of God incarnate, who said of Your word, "Thy word is truth." We bless you for the prophet Isaiah, through whom You told us that Your word goes forth and it does not return void. It does not fail to accomplish that which You have appointed it to accomplish. Your words do not fall, O God. Though the grass may wither, though the flowers may fade, though the glories of

*man may pass away, Your word stands. It is true, it is sure. It can be trusted.
Grant by Your Holy Spirit that we would hear it, understand it, and trust it even as
we read it tonight. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;
Let me never be ashamed.
In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
Incline Your ear to me and save me.
Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come;
You have given commandment to save me,
For You are my rock and my fortress.
Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked,
Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man,
For You are my hope;
O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth.
By You I have been sustained from my birth;
You are He who took me from my mother's womb;
My praise is continually of You.
I have become a marvel to many,
For You are my strong refuge.
My mouth is filled with Your praise
And with Your glory all day long.
Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
Do not forsake me when my strength fails.
For my enemies have spoken against me;
And those who watch for my life have consulted together,
Saying, "God has forsaken him;
Pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver."
O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, hasten to my help!
Let those who are adversaries of my soul be ashamed and consumed;
Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor, who seek to injure me.
But as for me, I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And of Your salvation all day long;
For I do not know the sum of them.
I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone.
O God, You have taught me from my youth,
And I still declare Your wondrous deeds.
And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me,
Until I declare Your strength to this generation,
Your power to all who are to come.
For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens,
You who have done great things;

O God, who is like You?
You who have (shown me many troubles and distresses
Will revive me again,
And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth.
May You increase my greatness
And turn to comfort me.
I will also praise You with a harp,
Even Your truth, O my God;
To You I will sing praises with the lyre,
O Holy One of Israel.
My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You;
And my soul, which You have redeemed.
My tongue also will utter Your righteousness all day long;
For they are ashamed, for they are humiliated who seek my hurt.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He add His blessing to it.

Two young men, two famous pop musicians in their twenties, wrote

“When I get older, losing my hair, many years from now; will you still be sending me a Valentine? Birthday greetings? A bottle of wine? Will you still need me? Will you still feed me when I'm 64.”

Some of you remember when it first came out, don't you? You don't have to admit it right now, but some of you remember it. It's The Beatles: John Lennon, Paul McCartney together penned those lyrics, wrote that song, “When I'm 64.” Now 64 doesn't look that old to a lot of folks, does it? Doesn't look that old to me anymore. I can relate to what they're saying: when I get older, losing my hair! Why, just yesterday, my son was browsing through the back of my head, and he said, “Daddy! You need to grow some new hair!” I said, “Son, you're right! I do need to grow some new hair.”

And there's no significance to the 64 other than The Beatles' song, now, you understand. I'm not setting that as the date of old age. I got a scowl from Brister Ware when I mentioned that at Ministers' Meeting the other day. No, age is a little bit relative. Old age is even more relative, isn't it? I remember a seminary student of mine. He was twenty-something, just out of seminary, ministering in his first congregation; and he had the privilege of marrying his sister-in-law to his new brother-in-law. Now, they were in their late thirties. This was the second time around for them. And in the pastoral prayer at the wedding, he gravely prayed, “Lord, as our brother and sister enter into their twilight years together....” The congregation reacted in the same way you just did, as you might imagine! He was twenty-something, and late thirties—that looked like the twilight years to him. I'm making no such suggestion tonight, that 64 is the boundary of those twilight years.

But just as John Lennon and Paul McCartney as young men looked forward and wondered whether their loves would love them when they got to be 64, this psalmist looks back, having known the faithful, continuous, upholding, sustaining love of God, and he asks God to uphold him still. Stay near me Lord, help me now that I am old. We don't know who this psalmist is. He uses many of the words of David, and it's clear that he's quoting from Psalms. He's praying and praising and singing with the words of God already recorded in the Psalms. He's setting a good example for us, isn't he? When we don't know what words to pray, plunder the Bible, and especially plunder the Psalms. And so even his vocabulary doesn't tip us off as to who he is. All we know, and very frankly all we need to know, is that this singer, this psalm-writer, is old or aging. He has seen exceptional trouble in his life, and the end is not yet in sight. And in that context he lifts up this song of both petition and praise to God. And I'd like to look at it with you tonight, just a few moments in six parts.

I. God's strength and righteousness comfort this aging saint in his troubles.

The first part you'll see in verses one, two, and three. It's the first stanza of the psalm. The psalmist is reminding us here that God's strength and God's righteousness are His comfort. The things that comfort this aging saint in his troubles are God's strengths and God's righteousness. "In You, O Lord, I have a refuge. In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me." This psalmist, though he is old, still needs a refuge and a rescuer.

David Dixon, the old Scottish commentator and minister, makes this comment: "Old age does not bring an end to troubles. As long as a child of God lives in this world, he must look for new afflictions." And that's where this psalmist is. He's trusted the Lord all his life, and here he is, aging and in old age, and he's still needing to fling himself upon the Lord's strength and protection. And so he reminds himself that it is in the Lord that he has taken refuge, and that it is in His righteousness to deliver him and rescue him.

The psalmist knows that the Lord has the strength to protect him. How does he know this? Because the Lord has done this all his life. And the psalmist also knows that when he is in the way of righteousness, even if he is being accused of unrighteousness by his enemies and peers, that the Lord, because He is righteous, because He is just, will be the one to render the final verdict on him. And he prays that God would deal with him now in accordance with that final verdict that he will render upon him. That is, the psalmist is not claiming to be perfect. He is not claiming to be sinless, but in these troubles, where he is being wrongly accused, he is saying, 'Lord, You're just. You're righteous. You know my heart. You render the verdict, instead of my enemies. If my enemies were to get to pronounce the final verdict on me, I'd be done for. So, Lord, because You're

righteous, You pronounce that verdict.'

You know, during this time of year, and especially in this once-every-four-year cycle, I get to really feeling sorry for politicians. All of them, even the ones I disagree with. Because you know, to run for office is to have your character slaughtered. And this psalmist is in something of that kind of a position. His character is being assaulted and called into question, in this case by his enemies. But because he knows that God is righteous, he relies on God to pass a fair judgment on him, rather than the unjust and unfair and untrue judgment of his enemies.

But you notice here that at the very outset, the troubles of this man's life have not gone away in old age. And so, he runs to God, to God's strengths, to God's righteousness to comfort him in his aging troubles. Matthew Henry says,

"They that are at home in God, that live a life of communion with Him and confidence in Him, that continually resort to Him by faith and prayer, having their eyes ever toward Him, may promise themselves that He will be a strong habitation to them; and such will never fall of itself, nor can ever be broken through by any invading power."

That's a great comfort in the twilight years. And this psalmist reminds us of it.

II. God has been his hope since youth and has sustained him before his birth.

But that is not all. If you look at verses four through six, you'll see a second thing. This psalmist, in the midst of his latter day troubles, now remembers that God has sustained him since youth. God has been his hope since he was an infant. God has been his hope since the days of his youth, and in fact, he says, God, who brought him out of the womb, this God has sustained him even before his birth. "Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and the ruthless man, for You are my hope; O Lord God, You are my confidence from my youth. By You I have been sustained from my birth. You are He who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you." Here he is in his old age and trouble, and what does he do? He remembers that ever since he can remember, the Lord has upheld him. He goes back to the earliest recollections of his memory, to the earliest days of his youth, and even before that. And he reminds himself of a lifelong relationship that he has had with God.

This is a covenant child. This is the child who, when the teacher says, "When did you become a Christian? When were you converted from darkness to light?", replies, "Oh, I've always known that I was a sinner, and I've always known that Jesus was my only hope. And I can't remember a day when I didn't trust Him.

From the various earliest days of my recollection, I was trusting in Jesus Christ. Oh, of course I grew in my understanding of what that meant, but from my earliest days I knew that I was a sinner in need of grace, and that Jesus Christ was my only hope of salvation.”

This man has a lifelong relationship with the Lord, and it's upheld him in the hardest of times. But do you notice what he emphasizes here? This relationship wasn't of his own devising. The Lord Himself brought him out of the womb. The Lord had prepared him for this lifelong relationship before he could have reached out to the Lord in this lifelong relationship.

Take your hymnals in hand and turn with me to No. 466. This is a psalm not about this, but it's a psalm which echoes the experience of every believer. It's an old song from the Southern Presbyterian Hymnal: “I Sought the Lord, and Afterwards I Knew.” It's the first stanza that I want you to look at:

“I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me.
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of Thee.”

This is the experience of every believer. We know that the only hope of salvation is resting and trusting in God, placing our faith in God, in His promises, in His Son. We must believe on Him. We must seek Him by faith, but when we seek Him by faith, when we place our trust in Him, we find something out. Long before we trusted Him, He was reaching out in grace to us. And the reason that we were seeking Him in the first place is that He was seeking us.

Remember how Spurgeon describes it? “On the front side of the pillar it says, “Whosoever will....”; and as you pass through and look back on the other side it says, “Chosen from before the foundation of the world.”

“I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me. It was not I that found, O Savior true. No, I was found of Thee.” And this psalmist says, that is the testimony of my life. Before I was brought into this world, God was upholding me. And so, in the midst of his trouble in old age he remembers the upholding of God which he has experienced in a lifelong relationship. You know, our birthdays could be used more poorly than to spend some time thinking about how the Lord has upheld us all our lives, and how He has been with us every step of the way, and how He has blessed us, and how He has answered in our time of need.

Matthew Henry says, “Very few days of man's appointing are more fitly observed in a serious religious way than the anniversary of one's own birth, which is a wonder second only to the new birth. Rich is the mercy therein displayed. But for this our very birth... [that is, but for this, for the new birth, for the grace of God to

us]... would have been an entrance into a thousand deaths.” And therefore our birthday is a day to remember the way the Lord has dealt graciously with us.”

III. Now in the weakness of life, he still looks to God for help and refuge.

Thirdly, look at verses seven through eleven. Now, here's the psalmist in the weakness of life. He's reminded himself that his trust and confidence is in God. He's reminded himself that the Lord has upheld him from youth. Now, in the weakness of his life, he affirms that he is still looking to God for help and refuge.

“I have become a marvel to many; for You are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with Your praise, and with Your glory all day long. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails. For my enemies have spoken against me; and those who watch for my life have consulted together, saying, “God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for there is no one to deliver.”

Here he is in this weak and vulnerable condition, having just remembered the way that the Lord has upheld him from youth, and he says, “Lord, I am feeling my mortality in ways that I've never felt it before. There was a day when I was a strong man, and I'm not as strong as I used to be. There was a day when I was a swift man, and I'm not as swift as I used to be. There was a day when I was a powerful man, and I'm not as powerful as I used to be. There was a day when I was a keen-eyed man, and my sight is fading. Lord, my enemies know it, and they're gathering around like vultures. They're saying, 'He was once a mighty warrior; now's our chance: God has forgotten him.'”

And what does he pray? He doesn't pray like John and Paul, “when I'm 64.” He says, “Lord, You've always cared for me. I feel my weakness now more than I've ever felt it before, and I realize now that even in my strength I was weak and I needed You. And now I'm asking You in my weakness, be with me. Be near me. Don't leave me. Don't forsake me.” It's a poignant prayer.

But let me tell you, my friends, it's not nearly so poignant as those who go through life without God, and get to their old age and don't know Him at all. It's a poignant thing to think of a faithful, mighty servant of the Lord growing old and asking the Lord not to discard him; but it's even a sadder thing to see someone looking for religion in old age instead of enjoying the comforts of it. And that, my young friends, is why you should remember the Creator in the days of your youth; and when you are old, neither will He depart from you, nor will you depart from Him.

IV. Armed with the memories of God's mercies he will assault heaven with praise.

So he looks to God for his help and refuge. But he's not done with praying yet. Look at verses twelve to sixteen. Now he arms himself with the specific memories of God's mercies, and he prepares to assault heaven with petition and prayer. Armed with memories of God's mercies, he will now storm the gates of heaven in intercession.

O God, do not be far from me; O God, my God, hasten to my help! Let those who are adversaries of my soul be ashamed and consumed; let them be covered with reproach and dishonor, who seek to injure me. But as for me, I will hope continually, and I will praise You yet more and more. My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all day long; for I do not know the sum of them.

Notice, he is going to tell the deeds of God's righteousness to him, and he is going to attempt to number the deeds of God's righteousness to him, even though he doesn't think he can count that high. It sort of reminds you of "count your many blessings, count them one by one," doesn't it? That's what he's saying. He's saying, "Lord, I'm getting ready to come into Your throne room of grace, and I'm getting read to come in Your throne room of grace with petitions, I'm coming in with the tales of Your faithfulness to me, and with the numbers of times which You have spared me and You've helped me, and You've aided me."

Let me ask you to take your hymnals in hand again, and turn back to No. 56, because some of the words that the psalmist uses here are borrowed from the Psalm on which this glorious hymn of Joseph Addison is based. It's one well worth memorizing.

When all Your mercies, O my God, my rising soul surveys;
Transported with the view, I'm lost in wonder, love and praise.
Unnumbered comforts to my soul, Your tender care bestowed
Before my infant heart conceived from Whom those comforts flowed.
When worn with sickness, oft have You with health renewed my face;
And when in sins and sorrows sunk, revived my soul with grace.
Ten thousand thousand precious gifts my daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least a cheerful heart that tastes those gifts with joy.
Through every period of my life, Your goodness I'll pursue;
And after death in distant worlds, the glorious theme renew.

Here is the psalmist expressing exactly the sentiment of the hymn writer. He's armed with the memories of God's mercy, and so he assaults heaven with praise, numbering and telling of the righteous deeds of God to him.

That's why, though he's cast down, look at verse 14, though he's cast down, he's never in despair. He will hope continually. Have you noticed how many times he's said *continually* in this Psalm? He's so confident of God's mercies to him, that he

can hope through anything.

V. The Psalmist celebrates God's lifelong care and embraces the truth that the Lord of trouble is the Lord of revival.

And then if you look at verses 17 to 21, we see the fifth section or stanza of the Psalm. Here the psalmist celebrates God's lifelong care, and he embraces the truth that it is the Lord of trouble who is also the Lord of rescue. Or to put it the other way around, the Lord for whom he is appealing rescue, is also the Lord who is sovereign over his troubles:

“O God, You have taught me from my youth, and I still declare Your wondrous deeds; and even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me until I declare Your strength to this generation.”

Notice what he asks for: “Lord, uphold me so that I can tell *this* generation the glory of what You have done for me. I want to be a witness to them; I want my example to comfort them.” Just as we sang earlier tonight: “I want my example to be a comfort to them. I want my example to bring them to praise You.” Are there any better preachers of the works of God to be found than the gray-haired parents and grandparents with the circle of their children and grandchildren around them, telling them of the deeds of the Lord in their lives?

A friend of mine just sent me a note not long ago, when he tells of recovering parts of a journal that his father wrote in the final days of his life. He had had a meal with his father, a cup of coffee, and his father had said to him on the way, “We should have done this more.” Young people, don't regret not having heard from your parents and your grandparents and your elder brothers and sisters in Christ more; and elder brothers and sisters in Christ, don't regret having not shared more of what God has done for you with your children and your grandchildren, and your younger brothers and sisters in Christ.

You know, there is a peculiar dreariness that attends an old age that is unsupported by the grace and power of God; but there is also a peculiar sweetness to an old age which is attended by godliness, and upheld by the workings of God's grace and power. And there is no more powerful testimony in the life of a young person than to see the tangible evidence of the workings of God's Spirit crafting the heart of an aged saint, and molding her or him into the very image of the Savior.

And the psalmist here acknowledges that sometimes it is the very trouble that God makes his children to experience that contributes to the increase of their greatness and godliness, their Christ-likeness.

“For your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens. You who have done

great things, O God, who is like You? You who have shown me many troubles and distresses, You will revive me again and bring me up from the depths of the earth.”

You see, the psalmist acknowledges that the Lord of trouble is the Lord of revival; that the Lord who has been sovereign over the hardest things in his life is the Lord who is sovereign over the best things in his life; and the Lord who can bring him rescue in the midst of any circumstance.

VI. All of this leads to worship

And what does this lead him to (verses 22-24)? Worship. Where else could it lead? “Through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble and in woe, the praise of my God I sing....”

And that's exactly what he does. Having looked back upon God's faithfulness in the past, having taken comfort from that; having looked to the same God for aid in his old age; having remembered specifically the things that God had done for him; having noted that the way that God had crafted him into the image of Christ was through the very troubles which were the travail of his soul, he worships God. And shouldn't we? Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, You are the one constant in this fickle, fallen world. You are our one hope, our one refuge, our one strength, our one comfort. But You Yourself are all we'll ever need, and so we praise God, from whom all blessings flow. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you stand for God's benediction.

Peace be to the brethren, and love, with faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord, until the daybreak and the shadows flee away. Amen.

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