

THE TESTIMONY OF A GRAY-HEADED SAINT

PSALM 71

Introduction:

We do not know the name of the author since the psalm has no subscription.

We know only that he lived a long time, his hair became gray, his strength became limited, and he continued in his attempt to be faithful to God.

Evidently he had occupied a place of leadership in the nation in the past. The great devotional writer Matthew Henry hears the prayer and testimony of David in the psalm. It is a matter of record that the troubles of David continued to the end of his life, and these words would surely have been appropriate for him.

Keil and Delitzch identify Jeremiah as the psalmist. This faithful prophet surely demonstrated faithfulness to God through the toughest of times as the nation fell around him. The last years of his life were not easy, according to Scripture and tradition. Tradition claims that he died as a martyr in Egypt at the hand of his own countrymen.

I choose to make them my words, and invite you to make them your words. They are found in Scripture so we may have guidance for just this period in our lives when the hair has turned white, and the arms have lost much of

their strength. When the limitations imposed by age beset you, hopefully you can give the prayerful testimony of this psalm.

Consider what he declares!

I. LIFE IS STILL A BATTLE.

The psalmist does not identify his enemy—he only points to the wicked character and the evil intentions of his enemy. “Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of wicked, out the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.” (v. 4) “For my enemies speak against me, and those who lie in wait for me take counsel together, saying, “God has forsaken him; pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him.” (v. 10, 11)

Neither David or Jeremiah were ever without adversaries. Their testimony in old age was that the battle still continues.

For most of us the battle is spiritual, but it continues even when your hair is gray.

Knight, who wrote a helpful study guide on the Psalms, often compares these enemies to the diseases, discouragements, depressions that seem to be a continual foe to those who press on in the way. And they surely are. Our enemy is smart enough to use the bad things that happen to us in the aging process against us. He will be continually seeking to destroy our confidence in the Lord.

1. The battle with the devil continues.

The devil does not give up. He has no respect for old age. Peter warned us to vigilant unto the end of life because the devil continues to stalk us like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

William Gurnall identified the “evil day” in Ephesians 6 as being the last days of life. He contended that we will fight our greatest battles toward the end of life.

2. The battle with the flesh continues.

The body may grow weaker with the passing of years, but not the old sinful nature within us. The struggle between the flesh and the spirit continue as long as there is life in the body. Actually a weakened body may expose the inner spirit to even greater struggles with the flesh.

3. The battle with the world continues.

It will continue to appeal to the desires of the eyes, and desires of flesh, and to the pride of life.

II. GOD HAS BEEN GOOD AND FAITHFUL ALL THE WAY.

“By you I have been upheld from my birth; You are He who took me out of my mother’s womb. My praise shall be continually with You.” (v. 6) “ O God , You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works.”

1. At birth.

When most of us were born, birth was much more treacherous than it is today. I was not born in a modern sanitized hospital, but in a mountain cottage with the help of a country doctor who climbed up the hill to our little house.

David had been born in such a home in Bethlehem, and his mother probably had the help of a godly neighbor or a midwife. The fact that he survived the birth experience was a sign of the goodness of the Lord. God had brought him through this crisis into the experience of life with health.

2. In youth.

God had brought him through the risky phase of life known as youth. In another context David recounts his encounters with lions and bears as he kept the flocks of Jesse. God had brought him through those years. What do you remember about those years? I know of at least one friend here who worked as a clown at rodeos in those years. It was his job to protect the cowboys when they were thrown by the angry bulls. Not the safest venture in life! But God brought him through.

3. In the middle years.

The young adult years of David's life had been spent in the military. He had been involved in one military conflict after another until he became the

object of Saul's rage. Then for an extended part of his life, he lived with only one step between him and death each day. Saul or his representatives were always on his trail. But God brought him through!

Some of you have similar testimonies to bear. I never went to war, but I did start going to deacon's meetings when I was only eighteen! That should count for something!

And then in my more adult period of life I have been faithful in attendance at Baptist conventions, which has had some similarity to a war zone! Yet God has been faithful.

4. And now.

"O God, you have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare your wondrous works. Now when I am old and gray headed, O God, do not forsake me." (v. 18)

III. GOD IS STILL MY ONLY HOPE.

Nothing has changed. Gray hair has not brought self-sufficiency. Rather it has only increased the awareness of how deeply and desperately we need the Lord.

1. He is still my only Protection.

"Be my strong habitation, to which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress." (v. 3)

2. He is still my only Strength.

I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only. (v. 16)

3. He is still my only Savior.

You have given the commandment to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress.” (v. 3b)

IV. I STILL HAVE WORK TO DO.

You do not need me to tell you that the concept of retirement is not found in the Bible. God’s call to ministry was a lifetime call. I sense that my work is not finished. We do not do in the same place or in the same way, but there are still tasks to be performed.

1. I have a story to tell to the next generation. (v. 17-18)

“Until I declare your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come.” (v. 18b)

Alice and I look for opportunities to touch the lives of our grandchildren, and honestly, she probably more than me. We did something unusual last year. When my home church in the mountains of East Tennessee built a new building, and demolished the old building, they saved the old windows from the church. I requested one of the windows through the pastor. While I was

preaching in East Tennessee in the spring of last year, he called and told me I needed to pick up my window.

The windows are not fancy, but they are over a hundred years old. They are the kind that had the names of some leaders of the church who had died before the building was built. I asked the only living member of my father's family which window I should choose. She told me that I should choose the one with the name of Jacob and Martha Smith in it. Actually they were the grandparents of my father on his mother's side of the family. Jacob died in 1895—a Civil War veteran. I am not sure which side he took in the war because he had a twin brother who fought on the other side.

Actually my father was named after him. We hauled this window to Lubbock, and hung it in a prominent place in our home. I wanted my children to know that their great, great, great grandfather was a leader in the church. I wanted my grandchildren to know that their great, great, great grandfather was a follower of Jesus. I want them to understand that they have a Christian heritage, and I want them to walk in that way. My job is not finished until I have taught them what God has taught me both by precept and example.

2. I have a song of gratitude to sing to God. (v. 22-24)

“Also with the lute I will praise you—and your faithfulness, O my God! To you I will sing with the harp, O holy One of Israel. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to you, and my soul, which You have redeemed.”

His total person will be involved in offering praise to the Lord. He will minister praise with his hands as he plays the harp, with his lips as he joyfully sings, his tongue as he utters the goodness of the Lord, and his soul as he sings to the Lord. His inner gratitude will employ the whole body in the praise of the Lord.

Maybe you cannot play the harp like David, but at least you could pat your foot while you praise. Get the whole body involved in the praise of our God.

In 1836 Charles Simeon retired after fifty-four years of ministry at Holy Trinity, Cambridge. A friend, discovering that he was still rising at 4 a.m. to light his own fire and spend time alone with God, remonstrated, ‘Mr. Simeon, do you not think that, now you are retired, you might take things more easily?’ ‘What?’ replied the old man, ‘Shall I not now run with all my might when the winning-post is in sight!’¹

¹Carson, D. A. 1994. *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) . Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA