

Exod 03-08-24a

As we engage in worship this morning and fellowship together, we pause at this point to go to the Lord in prayer. It's our opportunity to clear the decks in our soul. All of us have issues that either distract us because they are positive and alluring, or they distract us because they are negative and oppressive.

But in either case, we want to come to the center and the balance point and recognize that everything in our life, whether it is prosperity or adversity, whether we are simply putting one foot in front of the other, taking the steps of our daily life, everything we encounter, everything we endure or enjoy is a part of God's plan. It is a part of the curriculum that God has individually tailored, individually designed. That's why many of us have widely differing sets of circumstances, because our curriculum is individually tailored to prepare us, to teach us, to enable us to grow, enable us to expand our capacity.

One of the great studies that I was privileged to hear and learn from when I was a teenager was a study on capacity. It is easy to find that there are things that seem great, but they do not entail capacity. That's something I'm going to talk about right after the prayer.

But it is our chance as we go to the Lord in prayer to be sure that we have the ability, the capacity, to hear and make use of the content of the Word of God. So let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank you for this day.

Thank you for the many provisions and blessings and providences that are a part of our daily life. We thank you that because we are secure in the Lord Jesus Christ, because we are named in your book, we are numbered among your family and your people, you care for us, you watch over us, and it is as though we individually and by ourselves are at the very center and focus of your plan and purpose in human history. We thank you that because of your infinite grace and infinite mercy and infinite love, we are nurtured, we are encouraged, we are chastened and rebuked, we are given everything we need to grow in grace and grow in knowledge so that our lives can reflect your glory and can vindicate and illustrate the greatness of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in saving us.

We thank you for the country in which we live. We thank you that we have freedom. We are not subject to the type of oppression and persecution and affliction that is the case in many parts of the world.

And we know that with that freedom and with that security and with that privilege and opportunity comes responsibility to avail ourselves of that freedom and of the availability of the teaching of your words so that we can push ahead and move toward the high ground of maturity. We pray for those who have the rule over us. We pray for our president, our senatorial and congressional leaders, those who sit on the bench in the judiciary, both federal and state.

We know that there are issues that face those individuals that must be resolved, and there is often a clear choice between honoring you and honoring your word and honoring the Christian roots and heritage of our nation and succumbing to the forces of liberalism and decay and decline that permeate our culture and our society, things that seem right to people but the ends thereof are the ways of death. We pray that you will grant clear sight and perception and the power of conviction and the power of character and integrity to each of those individuals so that they can make the decisions that will give us the opportunity to be a witness and a testimony as a nation that honors you even as we individually hope to do the same. We ask your blessing on us now as we study and fellowship together.

Bless our conversation. May the spiritual gift that you have granted to each one of us minister a blessing to all who are here. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, sometimes I have to pull my... I apologize if sometimes our prayers get long. I can just go on endlessly.

I wind up having all prayer and no lesson. For our script reading this morning, turn with me to Psalm 77. Psalm 77.

I mentioned this idea in our introductory remarks here this morning having to do with capacity. It's a very important subject. One of the things that we have seen with Israel in Exodus 13-14 and moving this morning into chapter 15 is that God is doing great things.

And there is a level of appreciation. Obviously, they're grateful to see the dead corpses of the Egyptians floating in the waters of the Red Sea, and they say, whew, that was a close one. But the capacity to appreciate what God does is something we don't always bring to the fore in our consciousness.

Our capacity may be thimble-sized. It may be drinking-glass-sized. Or it may be bucket-sized.

But to the extent that we have an appreciation and a capacity for a thing, it is to that extent that it is valuable and lasting in God's plan. There are different areas of capacity. I'd like to read you something before we have our scripture reading.

You may have seen or heard this before. This was a few years ago when the movie Fight Club came out. I didn't see the movie, but Brad Pitt starred in it.

And they had the usual round of publicity. And among other things, he was interviewed by Rolling Stone magazine. And the gist of the movie is there's a man who achieves a lot of things that he wanted to achieve, and he's still unsatisfied.

And so he has to look for alternative ways to try to fill this void. And so this man who has more or less achieved the American dream, and yet he's still unsatisfied. So they asked Brad Pitt, you know, what does he think about this? And this is what he said.

This is a quote. Man, I know all these things are supposed to seem important to us, the car, the condo, our version of success. But if that's the case, why is the general feeling out there reflecting more impotence and isolation and desperation and loneliness? If you ask me, I say toss all this.

We've got to find something else. Because all I know is that at this point in time, we are heading for a dead end, a numbing of the soul, a complete atrophy of the spiritual being. And I don't want that.

Who would have thought Brad Pitt could put three thoughts together? Rolling Stone says, so if we're heading toward this kind of existential dead end in society, what do you think should happen? And Pitt says, hey, man, I don't have those answers yet. The emphasis now is on success and personal gain. He smiles and says, I'm sitting in it, and I'm telling you that's not it.

I'm the guy who's got everything. Of course, at this time he was married to Jennifer Aniston. He says, I know, but I'm telling you, once you've got everything, then you're just left with yourself.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again. It doesn't help you sleep any better, and you don't wake up any better because of it. Now, this is not a new thought that Brad has brought to the fore, but it's a matter of capacity.

If we have relationship with God, if we have a developing soul, if we have spiritual life, God has the power and is in the process of creating capacity. There is a wonderful blessing to be enjoyed, whether we are in prosperity or in adversity. I think prosperity is great.

I work for an exceedingly prosperous Christian man. And it isn't a matter of all prosperity is bad and all poverty is good. It isn't a matter of all poverty being bad and all prosperity being good.

It is a matter of what happens in your soul in those circumstances. If you have prosperity, do you have the capacity to appreciate it? If you have adversity, do you have the capacity to appreciate it? And this is the challenge, because in our flesh and in our humanity, we don't. It is the enjoyments, the stimulations are fleeting.

God gives us a cup in the soul that He can fill to overflowing, like David talks about in Psalm 23. Well, what we're looking at in Exodus is a nation that has just been born. They're still in the flesh.

They know virtually nothing of God, right? So God does perhaps the greatest miracle in human history in His wreaking of havoc in the land of Egypt, His deliverance of His people out of Egypt, after having multiplied them enormously, after having let them endure great affliction and suffering, which I'm sure they did not understand, He is demonstrating. He says, I am. I am the God of Abraham.

I am the God of Isaac. When people ask Moses, who is it that has sent Him? He is to say, I am has sent me. God is now, in these next several chapters of Exodus, going to try to create

capacity in the nation of Israel, in the people and in their hearts, because right now they don't have it.

We're seeing that this great deliverance and all of the distinction between Israel and Egypt and the plagues, delivering them out with a mighty hand, and giving them all of this wealth that they never had. They've been slaves, for crying out loud, for 200 odd years. Now, they're coming out with great possessions.

They've got the gold and the booty. They've got the linens and the silks. They've got the flocks and the herds.

They're coming out as a great body of probably 2 million people. And yet, at the first cloud on the horizon, as the dust rises from the chariots of Pharaoh's army, they don't think about the gold. They don't think about the silks.

They don't think about the flocks. They don't think about the herd. They don't think about the promise of the land.

They don't think about the promise of God that He's taking them to a land flowing with milk and honey. What is on their mind? It's all about fear. It's all about, I'm going to die.

Were there not enough graves in Egypt that you brought us out here to die? And what does this show? Very little capacity. And it's understandable. They've only known about God for a matter of months in terms of His active intervention in their lives.

Before that, it was just history. God made a promise to Abraham, I see the bones of Joseph. But it wasn't real.

It wasn't immediate. It wasn't personal. God has revealed Himself as Yahweh, the personal God, to them.

He's told them His name. And He's delivered them with a mighty hand. Everybody has acted in their lives in an extraordinary and supernatural way.

But it takes time to develop capacity. Whether it's capacity for life, to appreciate whatever comes in life. Paul, the apostle, had capacity.

He said, I have learned over the course of time in whatever state I find myself to abide in contentment. Whether I am abased or whether I abound. I'm content.

I have a level of satisfaction. It doesn't mean I'm jumping up and down. No one enjoys being flogged and thrown into prison.

Paul got to 40 lashes minus one three times. And you think about the third time after he had healed up. You can't imagine what his back looked like.

You've seen these black and white pictures that Matthew Brady took of slaves that had been beaten in the South. You see the whelps on their back. I could go on a long diatribe about the cat-and-nine-tails that the Romans used and that was used for discipline in ancient times.

These long leather thongs that had bits of iron and glass and sharp, heavy things. And these thongs, when they would whip you, would wrap around. It wasn't just on your back.

It would wrap around and tear the flesh all the way around your ribcage. Now you think about a strong, burly man wielding this thing. Your defenseless, naked torso is over here.

And you think about somebody using one of those 39 times. And you heal up from that. And sometime later... And again, this is none of your doing.

You have violated no law. You have been doing exactly what God told you to do. And you're up there again.

I don't know how much of the first one had healed before he got the second one. 39 times. Think about the number 39.

Just tap yourself on the forehead 39 times and you'll have pain. At least I do. 39 times.

Think about it. There's just virtually no flesh left on you. And he healed up from that.

And then a third time. And this doesn't even begin to go into the imprisonments, the other beatings, the shipwrecks, all of the other things that Paul endured in the course of his service to God as an apostle. And what does Paul say after that? He says, I've learned, in whatever state I find myself... You think about the second or third day after one of those beatings.

When you move and your scars and your scabs crack open. When you're trying to keep the things closed because they keep splitting open and bleeding. Every breath.

If you've ever had a cracked rib or torn a muscle in your chest wall, every breath gives you a pain. That is insignificantly microscopic compared to the agony that someone would have to live through for weeks and weeks after a beating like that. Some people died.

Paul went through it three times. He's the man that said, I have learned to be content, whatever my circumstances are. That's capacity.

It's capacity to let God fill your cup because your cup isn't made out of circumstances. Your cup is made out of spiritual life. Out of faith in God and belief that He loves us and that whatever be tied... We were cleaning up the office and the visual for the song, you know, God will take care of you.

It says, Be not dismayed, whatever be tied. God will take care of you. Well, that belief and that trust constitutes the cup.

And the more belief and the more trust we have, the bigger the cup is and the more God can fill it. And when we abound, we really abound. And we don't have to be like Brad Pitt.

When we've got some blessings and we've got some prosperity, I mean, we can squeeze every drop of satisfaction and bliss and happiness and enduring benefit from that. When it goes away, we say, you know, I'm just grateful that God ever let me enjoy something like that. Who would have thought and not to be, you know, feeling such a sense of loss that now there's no capacity for the present.

It's capacity. Psalm 77 is our script reading this morning. And I want to take a look at this because actually I came here by accident.

And I was researching a verb that's in our Exodus 15. And it's a relatively rare word group. And there's a noun and a verb that are tied together.

And Psalm 77 is one of the only three places where this particular word occurs. And I was looking at this psalm and it really reflects what's going on in this Exodus experience. This is the psalm of Asaph.

It is dedicated to the chief musician, to Jedethon. You can do a whole study just on these superscriptions. But look at what it says.

He says, I cried out to God with my voice, to God with my voice, and He gave ear to me. In the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing.

My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God and was troubled. I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.

Silah. Silah means it's a musical notation that either means go back and repeat that or stop and let the musicians play and reflect on what is said. It is an interruption that is designed to focus our attention on what has just been said.

There is not a human being alive that has not been at a point where they could have written with heart and feeling these three verses. Then he continues, You hold my eyelids open. I am so troubled I cannot speak.

I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night. I meditate within my heart, and my spirit makes diligent search.

Will the Lord cast off forever? Will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Silah. It's another break in the progress of thought here. Then we have what lies at the very center and the very heart of this psalm.

It is one short phrase in the Hebrew text here. It actually comprises three words. Va'omar chaloti hi.

Va'omar chaloti hi. This is right at the center. This is like being in the center of a chiasm.

And it says in your English, I said, this is my anguish. The word that's translated anguish there is the word that links over to our study in Exodus. This is my anguish.

The word there actually means illness or affliction. And there is emphasis because of the word hi, the very last thing I said there. Va'omar means I said.

Chaloti is our word. And then you have hi, which is this. It's actually her or she in this context.

In Hebrew, who is he? He is she. But it's a feminine word. And so it says this.

And you may remember from our study in Ecclesiastes, when you say this in the feminine, it talks about a concept a lot of times. If you don't have a feminine noun in the immediate context, which we don't here, it means what I have just said. Concepts are feminine in Hebrew.

So he says all of this, this affliction, this staying awake in the night, this searching of soul, and this questioning in my mind that says, has God cast me off? Is He no longer going to be favorable? Has His mercy ceased? Has His promise failed? Has He forgotten to be gracious? Is He angry and He's taken away His mercy? The psalmist says, this is my affliction. This is my illness. This is what's really the matter with me.

Are these doubts? Are these this question, this unknown? So the rest of the psalm is the antidote. It is the cure. It is the medicine for this illness, this affliction.

The words I will remember, they're in italics because they're not in the original. He says, the years of the right hand of the Most High, I will remember. The works of the Lord.

And the subject and object there bracket the idea of remembering. The years of the right hand of the Most High, I will remember. The works of the Lord.

The works of the Lord are the right hand of the Most High in action in past years. He says, I don't see the work of the Lord in evidence right now. I am tempted to question whether He has withdrawn Himself in anger or whether His mercy has ceased or He has cast me off.

But it says, this is my problem, this is my illness, this is my affliction, is my question about what's going on. He says, the years of the right hand of the Most High, I will remember. The works of the Lord.

Surely I will remember your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all your work and talk of your deeds. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary.

Who is so great a God as our God? You are the God who does wonders. You have declared your strength among the peoples. You have, with your arm, redeemed your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.

The waters saw you, O God. Now this is a reference to what we have just studied in Exodus 14. These are the waters of Yom Suf.

The waters saw you, O God. The waters saw you. They were afraid.

The depths also trembled. The clouds poured out water. The skies sent out a sound.

Your arrows also flashed about. This is lightning. The voice of your thunder was in the whirlwind.

The lightnings lit up the world. The earth trembled and shook. Your way was in the sea.

This is the way of deliverance. Your path in the great waters. And your footsteps were not known.

Now this doesn't mean the imprints left by God's feet. It's the footsteps that His people were supposed to follow. They didn't know where this was going to lead.

They couldn't see the end. Your way was in the sea. Your path in the great waters.

And your footsteps were not known. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. If there's any doubt that we think, well, maybe this is Noah's flood or something.

This is the Red Sea. This is the path of deliverance. This is the way of escape.

And what's the psalmist's point here? He says, I think back. How does God typically act? He let the Israelites see the Egyptians coming before He put the screen of the cloud between them and the Egyptians. He let them see it.

They're backed up against the water. They're in a crisis. They're in a fearful situation.

And they say, we're all going to die. Then, with this great east wind that blew and part of the water, here is the path of God. Your way is in the sea.

Your path is in the great waters. Your footsteps were not known. Nobody knew that that was going to be the path of God's deliverance.

Who ever heard of people walking through the sea as a way of escape? It's very unorthodox, shall we say. It's not a part of human experience. The other thing we find out that's very interesting to me here is that there is a lot of memory.

Remember, the psalmist here is writing maybe 400 years after the fact. He's very near in time. Verbal oral history, verbal passing along of things was an art and a science in those days because there was very little literacy.

People didn't carry around papyrus, hadn't even learned how to do any writing except for just a very few scribes. So the way that history was transmitted, the way knowledge passed from

generation to generation was orally. And so, the psalmist preserves some recollection here of the people who went through the Red Sea experience, the Yom Suf experience, that is not even in the pages of Exodus.

And that is that along with this wind, there were great thunderstorms and it rained. And if you think about it, this explains some of what happened to the Egyptian chariots. The east wind blew, part of the sea, God dries the ground, either naturally or supernaturally, so that the Israelites walk across on dry ground.

Completely unforeseen mode of deliverance. Who would have thought, of all of the possible options, why didn't God just stop the hearts of the Egyptians and they just slumped over in their chariots? And then the Israelites could just march and find the usual ford, the usual crossing. Could God have done that? Could God have just had all the horses die and all the wheels fall off the chariots and leave the Egyptians jumping up and down like Yosemite Sam, impotently shaking their fist at the Israelites? Jesus, when he was threatened in his home area up there in Nazareth, in Galilee, there was a crowd that was going to throw him off a cliff.

But then it says he passed through their midst and went away. And we don't know what it is that restrained the people. There was a mob ready to throw him off the cliff and for some reason he just walked through the midst of them.

Why didn't the Israelites just walk away and for some reason the Egyptians not follow? God orchestrated this. God did this on purpose. He makes this way through the sea that they didn't see coming.

Here it is, supernatural. Over they go. Then it tells us that a west wind blew and shoved... As the Egyptians are trying to go back the way they came, there's water and wind rushing at their face.

And along with that, the psalmist here tells us that the clouds poured out water. There's thunder and lightning, the arrows of God, God's thunder. There's this whirlwind.

You had an east wind, now you've got a west wind. The wind is blowing every which way. The lightnings lit up the world.

The earth trembled and shook. God's way was in the sea, path in the great waters. His footsteps were not known.

He led his people like a flock and what's likely is that this sea bottom, which is normally muck, had been completely dried for the Israelites to cross. Then when it starts raining, even before the waters close over them, if it starts raining, what's going to happen to that sea bottom? It's just going to turn to muck and their chariot wheels are going to get stuck and start coming loose. And they can't move.

They can't get back. Their horses are, you know, every time they lift one hoof, three others sink into the mire there. And so they're immobilized and then the waters close over them.

And that's why not one lived to tell the tale. The Bible says twice, not one escaped. And so we have that picture here.

But what's the point? Our capacity to trust God comes from looking at what He has done in the past. What is it that the Israelites forget when they start crying out to Moses? They say, were there no graves in Egypt that you had to bring us out here to die? They don't say, well, let's see. Plague number one.

Plague number two. Plague number three. Plague number four.

Let's see. God preserved us in the hailstorm. God preserved us from the lice.

God preserved us from the flies. God preserved us from the moraine of cattle and all. God preserved us in the darkness.

We still had light in Goshen. Hmm. Seems kind of odd and bizarre that God would preserve us through all these plagues and then kind of get distracted and let us die out here in the desert.

He's obviously demonstrated that He has a profound interest in preserving us and protecting us and blessing us, delivering us with a mighty hand, giving us loot from the Egyptians. But their capacity to appreciate all of that is just thimble-sized. At the first sign of pressure, it is as though it doesn't exist.

Why did God make such a demonstration of their deliverance? As I said, He could have just given all of the Egyptians a pulmonary embolism and had them slump over and they could have marched away. But it's not dramatic. It's not memorable.

God is saying, look, I want to do something dramatic, never been seen before, the last time there were overwhelming waters, everybody died except Noah and the others in the ark. I'm going to show you deliverance through those same waters. The waters are still going to destroy the infidels, but my people are preserved.

They walk right through. Your path is in the great waters. Your way is in the sea.

You may not know where it leads, you may not know what's on the other side, but it's the path that God has made. It's the path that God has chosen for His people and we're supposed to learn something from it. We're supposed to increase our capacity.

Go with me now back to Exodus 14. We're right at the end. We've already seen the details of the flood.

We stopped and took a detour last time looking at the time of the sojourn. But the summary at the end of this chapter says, in verse 27, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. When the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth while the Egyptians were fleeing into it.

The Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and

covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them, not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

So the Lord delivered Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt. So the people feared the Lord and they believed the Lord and His servant Moses.

That is our call. That is our responsibility as people of God is to do what the psalmist does in Psalm 77. He says, you know, I was overwhelmed.

I couldn't go to sleep at night. This was my illness. This was my affliction.

What do I do? I go back and look at the works of the Lord. Does He preserve His people? Does He make a path for them even if the path is unknown? Yes, He does. What is required have to be willing to walk the path.

Right? If you can't see the end of it, He says the end of the way is unknown in Psalm 77. If people said, I ain't walking between no walls of water. What do I do? Do I have fool written all over my face? How do I know how long that's going to last? Well, who is the God of the plagues? Who is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is He going to lure His people into the middle of the sea and then destroy them? It takes faith.

It's the same in personal relationships. There are times when somebody may start adducing evidence and saying, well, you know, I saw a car parked in front of so-and-so's house at an odd time of the night or odd time of the day. And we say, well, I happen to know so-and-so and they're a person of integrity and whatever you may believe about them, that's just not true.

I know them. I have confidence in their character. Job had confidence in the character of God.

People say, man, his one wife came in and said, Job, our children have been slaughtered. All of the animals are gone. Look at your skin.

You're sitting here scraping yourself with a piece of broken jug. What kind of a God do you serve that's letting this happen to you? Job says, look, Mrs. Job, God can come down here and kill me and I'm not going to quit trusting Him. He knows what He's doing.

This is the path that He has chosen. He's got a good reason. And I don't care what it looks like.

I don't care how it seems. I don't care how it sounds. I know God.

God is my benefactor. God has given. God has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Job knew how to abound. He abounds before and he doubly abounds after.

When he goes through a period of adversity, he has his questions. That's what the book of Job is about. How can I get a better communication channel between me and God? Because I sure don't understand this.

My eyes are open in the night. I am sorely afflicted. I have suffered a severe blow.

He's not cheerful and counted all joy, brethren. But one thing he never does, his confidence in God is never shaken. He says, I wish there were a mediator.

The whole book of Job is about mediatorship. We do have that mediator. But we have to recognize that God puts us through the valley of the shadow of death.

Even in Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. He leads me in the still waters and the green pastures. He restores my soul.

He also takes me through the valley of the shadow of death. And I'm not going to fear evil when I go through there because God's with me. He comforts me with his staff and his shepherd's stick.

He takes me through the valley of death. People don't think about that when they cite Psalm 23. God takes us through the valley of the shadow.

We cannot let our confidence in God be shaken. We need to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to move into chapter 15 of Exodus.

And we're going to see the celebration song that is sung by the children of Israel. And there are some fascinating things in that. But let's pause here and take our break.