

Finishing Well: Faithful to the End

Psalm 41

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Before we get into Psalm 41, I want you to think back to the Upper Room where Jesus was sharing a meal with His disciples. The room was quiet, but it wasn't necessarily peaceful. Jesus sat at the table with His disciples, breaking bread; it should have felt warm and familiar, but instead, there was a heaviness in the air. After all, these were His friends; they were the men who had walked with Him, listened to Him, and leaned on Him. And yet, in that sacred moment, Jesus knew something they didn't fully grasp — one of them would betray Him. One of them, who had eaten His bread with Him, who had shared His life with Him, would turn against Him. This must have been extremely painful for Him.

Listen to what I am about to say: There are painful, sinful wounds in life that our enemies simply cannot inflict — only friends can. Only people whom you've trusted can cause that kind of pain. Some of you know exactly what that feels like. You expect opposition from the outside, but not from the inside — not from someone whom you knew, you trusted, whom you believed loved you. That kind of pain lingers and cuts to the bone. It unsettles you. It makes it difficult for you to trust others as you move forward. It also makes you wonder where God is in the middle of all of the pain and betrayal.

And, yet, it's right there — in that space of that weakness, betrayal, and quiet suffering — that Jesus reaches back into the words of Psalm 41:9 and applies King David's words to Himself when He says,

My close friend, the man whom I trusted, whom I ate meals with, and have done life with, has betrayed Me.

What King David experienced in part, Jesus experienced in its fullness. And what we begin to see is that Psalm 41 is not just about David's story — it's about the faithful endurance of the One who was betrayed, who suffered, and yet remained perfectly faithful all the way to the end. Psalm 41 is more of Jesus' experience than David's.

We are about to dig into Psalm 41, which is the end of Book 1 of the Psalms. As Book 1 comes to a close, it feels like David's life is coming to a close as well. The priests who organized the Psalms under the guidance of the Holy Spirit seem to have placed Psalm 41 at the end of Book 1 to help us get the sense of the end of David's life. Of course, there are other Psalms written by David in the book of Psalms, but the Psalms in Book 1 were selected by the Holy Spirit and placed in the order they are in to give us a sense of the flow of David's life. Now, in Psalm 41, we see the importance of faithfulness as the sun sets on David's life. We see the importance of finishing well.

David writes as a man who has known both compassion and pain, both loyalty and treachery. Some of these things were done to him, and some he did to others. King David was not a perfect man, yet what marks him most is this: He finishes with his life anchored in God. And for us, as followers of Jesus, this Psalm presses a central truth — *a faithful life is one that endures with Christ to the very end.*

We don't know the exact context of what was going on in David's life when he wrote Psalm 41. Most scholars believe that it was the time when Ahithophel betrayed David and joined David's son, Absalom, in rebellion against him. These events are recorded in 2 Samuel 16-18. You can tell by how David responded to Absalom's rebellion that this event broke his heart.

So, let's get into Psalm 41. Here's the main point: *The person who trusts the Lord and cares for others will be upheld by the Lord to the end.* In other words, God honors and sustains those who live faithful lives of compassion — especially toward the weak. He sustains those who remain loyal to Him, even when they suffer betrayal, sickness, or opposition. I have four points to help us walk through Psalm 41.

I. Faithfulness to God is Displayed through Our Compassion (vv. 1-3)

David opens not by recounting his suffering, but with a declaration of the LORD's covenantal blessing on those who remember "*the least of these*" in life. Listen to vv. 1-3 again:

*Blessed is the one who considers the poor!
In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him;
² the LORD protects him and keeps him alive;
he is called blessed in the land;
you do not give him up to the will of his enemies.
³ The LORD sustains him on his sickbed;
in his illness you restore him to full health.*

Psalm 41 begins with the word "*blessed*." If you remember, Psalm 1 opens Book 1 with the word "*blessed*," and now Book 1 closes with the word "*blessed*." So, Book 1 opens and closes with two Psalms that call us to the blessing of living lives of covenantal faithfulness to the LORD. It calls us to walk in the way of the righteous. The idea of "*blessing*" is one of the unifying themes of Book 1.

Now, specifically, the word "*blessed*" in Psalm 41 points us to deep, covenantal joy rooted in God's favor. And who receives this blessing? It's the one who considers the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the helpless, and the overlooked.

This is not mere emotion. The word "*considers*" implies thoughtful, intentional care. So, yes, we should pray for the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, and the helpless, but we must also be moved to action.

Compassion is mercy that has thought about what needs to be done, then moves out of its comfort zone and gets to work. The LORD calls His covenant people to live lives shaped by this kind of mercy.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:7,

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

So, those who are merciful will receive mercy. Psalm 41 poetically tells us the same thing. Listen to the blessing that the merciful receive:

*In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him;
² the LORD protects him and keeps him alive;
he is called blessed in the land;
you do not give him up to the will of his enemies.
³ The LORD sustains him on his sickbed;
in his illness you restore him to full health.*

This is not the prosperity gospel. Brothers and sisters, there is a place for this kind of blessing within God's covenant faithfulness to His people. The one who reflects God's heart will experience God's sustaining presence, especially in their weakness. The promises in vv. 1-3 tell us that God will deliver them out of trouble, protect and preserve their lives, and sustain them on their sick beds.

Now, listen to me here, while God blesses His people for being faithful to the poor in this way, it doesn't mean you can manipulate God with His promises. When you begin to think you can use God's promises to get what you want, then you are no longer being truly compassionate and merciful. You are being mercenary. God calls us to be genuinely merciful, not mercenary.

Truly merciful people don't admire compassion from a distance. Charles Spurgeon said:

They do not toss them a penny and go on their way, but inquire into their sorrows, sift out their causes, study the best ways for their relief, and practically come to their rescue; such as these have the mark of divine favor plainly upon them, and are as surely the sheep of the Lord's pasture.

God responds to that kind of life with protection, preservation, and sustaining grace—even in illness. Here's the bottom line: Faithfulness to God shows up in how you treat the needy, and God honors that.

A life that ends in faithfulness is not self-centered—it is Christ-centered, which means it is other-oriented. Faithfulness to Jesus is revealed in how we treat the least among us. As Jesus Himself said, "*As you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me.*"

II. Faithful People Live Lives of Repentance (v. 4)

*As for me, I said, "O LORD, be gracious to me;
heal me, for I have sinned against you!"*

Now, David turns inward and inspects his own heart. Despite his compassion toward others, he knows that he is not righteous in himself. He knows that although he is a man after God's own heart, he is also a sinner, so he confesses his sin and pleads for grace. David does not excuse himself. He does not blame others. He brings his sin directly before God.

This is crucial. Listen, a life that finishes well is not a sinless life—it is a repentant life. We do not endure in faithfulness because we are strong — we endure because we know we are weak and have to continually immerse ourselves in God's amazing grace. The Christian life is not sustained by perfection, but by a lifestyle of repentance and dependence on Jesus, the One who purchased the gift of repentance for us on the cross. Jesus' gift enables us to live faithful lives of repentance.

III. Faithfulness Doesn't Prevent Suffering or Conflict (vv. 5-9)

Now the Psalm deepens. These verses give balance to the promises made in vv. 1-3. In vv. 5-9, David describes enemies who speak evil, who visit him only to gather information, who whisper together against him. And then comes the deepest wound: Betrayal by a close friend.

Listen to vv. 5-9 and think of how they point us to Jesus:

*My enemies say of me in malice,
"When will he die, and his name perish?"*
⁶ *And when one comes to see me, he utters empty words,
while his heart gathers iniquity;
when he goes out, he tells it abroad.*
⁷ *All who hate me whisper together about me;
they imagine the worst for me.*
⁸ *They say, "A deadly thing is poured out on him;
he will not rise again from where he lies."*
⁹ *Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*

Verse 5 is a chilling statement because King David's enemies, who pretended to be his friends, are not merely opposing him, but he has figured out that they eagerly anticipate his death. They are ready for him to go.

Then vv. 6-7 tells us that they pretended to care about him. They would visit him, but it was to gather information to use against him. So, they would visit and ask questions in order to pump him for information. Their goal was not to help but harm. This is hypocrisy and manipulation at its highest. Have you ever experienced this? It's painful, and it occurs in relationships far more often than you think.

Verse 8 amplifies v. 5 as David's enemies cannot simply wait for him to die. They sat around and dreamed up ways for him to die. Not only that, they believed his illness was punishment from the Lord, but it was not.

Friends, suffering is sanctifying; it will help you grow spiritually and learn to depend on the Lord in ways you have never dreamed. But here's the deal: Not all suffering occurs in our lives because we have done something wrong. Sometimes God allows suffering to come into our lives to help us grow and mature in our faith. Sometimes

it is to correct us and discipline us, and bring us back to the Lord. Sometimes it is because someone has sinned against us, and this is sanctifying too. Sometimes we simply do not know why we are going through what we are going through. We don't know exactly why David went through what he did in vv. 5-9. Perhaps it was because his son and his friends rebelled against him, but we don't know for sure. Yet, what we do know is that it caused him to grow in faithfulness to the Lord.

The question is: How are you responding to the suffering and difficulties in your life? Are they making you bitter or better? Is your heart getting softer toward the Lord or harder?

Finally, v. 9 is a heartbreaking verse because this verse describes betrayal of the highest order. If you know the story of King David in 2 Samuel 16-18, you know not only did his friends betray him, but his son, Absalom, led a rebellion against his very own father.

Often, we expect opposition from outside our family, our circle of friends, or our team. This makes sense to us. However, when the betrayal comes from within your own circle of friends, family, or your team, it is deeply painful. As I said earlier, there are some wounds in life that enemies simply cannot inflict—only those we love the most can. Some of you know what I am talking about because you have had this experience.

However, here's the heartbreaking thing for David. His son and his friends didn't simply want him to give up being king; they wanted him dead.

Now, you may think this is far-fetched and happened within a royal family in that day and time. Surely it doesn't happen now, in normal relationships, but it does. I have a pastor friend who told me that at one church where he served, a group of people began to work against him. These were people who, at one time, loved him and he trusted them. They began to undermine his leadership. My friend was and still is a faithful pastor. He preached expositional sermons that were centered on the gospel every Sunday, yet that group of people hated it and hated him. Eventually, one man came up to him and told him to his face that he was praying that he would die.

Listen carefully, friends, faithfulness does not exempt us from pain — it often leads us into it. Faithfulness to the Lord doesn't prevent suffering. Remember what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount after He said, "*The merciful will receive mercy.*" This is a wonderful promise, but you have to keep reading because only a few verses later in vv. 11-12, Jesus said:

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Wow, where did the promise of mercy go? Listen to me, sometimes faithfulness leads you into spiritual warfare. We tend to tell ourselves that if we are faithful, then everything will be peaceful, but that is not always the case. Jesus teaches us that faithfulness to Him and the gospel will bring division within your own family. Listen, I wish we could do all the right things as Christians and that everything worked out peacefully, but it doesn't. Jesus tells us the gospel is like a sword, and it will bring division even within our own families and among our friends. Well, we must keep going, look at vv. 5-9 again.

Ultimately, vv. 5-9 echo forward into the New Testament, where Jesus is in the Upper Room celebrating Passover with His disciples and transitioning it to the Lord's Supper. As He serves His friends at the table, He literally quotes Psalm 41:9 and applies it to Judas.

*Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*

The Righteous Sufferer is betrayed by one who shared His table. Friends, David and Jesus were not merely dealing with their enemies but with relational heartbreak that comes from someone you love and trusted. The kind pain cuts deep and can cripple us if we are not careful.

Here's our struggle when it comes to finishing well and remaining faithful to the Lord when we have been betrayed. Many of us begin well, but when opposition and attacks from friends and family come, we tend to fall away. When we are wounded — especially by those we love, we wonder if it is worth it. This is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:37,

*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and
whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

Sometimes the opposition to our faithfulness to Christ comes from those we love the most. When that happens, who we love most is revealed. The temptation is to fear those we love the most more than we fear God. We fear losing our relationship with them, and when we fear they will not love us or accept us, we reveal who and what we truly love, the approval of friends and family more than God. So, beware when we love the approval of family and friends more than Jesus. If this happens, you will not finish the race that Jesus has marked out for you well.

IV. God's Faithfulness Sustains His People to the End (vv. 10-12)

In vv. 10-12 David returns to prayer. Look at what he says at the beginning of v. 10:

"But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up..."

So, let's think about how he was handling all that was happening to him: His enemies spoke lies about him. He had friends betray him, BUT he knew God was good and gracious, so he called on the name of the Lord. Listen to vv. 10-12:

*But you, O LORD, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them!
¹¹ By this I know that you delight in me:
my enemy will not shout in triumph over me.
¹² But you have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence forever.*

Did you catch v. 12? Let's read it again so it sinks into your heart.

*But you have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence forever.*

For us, "integrity" in this verse doesn't mean sinless perfection—it means a heart oriented toward God. A life that, despite failures, remains faithful to Jesus. In other words, this is the heart of the life that finishes well. This is the person who dies in faith and goes immediately into the presence of Jesus forever.

Ultimately, v. 12 is true for us because Jesus lived a life of sinless perfection and integrity. He laid His life down by being nailed to the cross to pay for our sins, or we might say because of our "lack of integrity." We were unable to live up to God's standard of perfection, so He lived it for us and then died in our place to pay for our sins. He purchased forgiveness and the ability for us to live lives of repentance of our sins. Now, by our faith in Him and repentance of our sin, our sins are transferred to Him, and His righteousness is given to us. By this, what we call the Great Exchange, we are given the gift of eternal life so that when we die, we may live *in His presence forever* because Jesus has given us the gift of His integrity. God looks at us through the blood of Christ and sees Jesus' integrity in us as if we had lived a life of perfect integrity.

This is amazing, right? When it comes to finishing well, there is only One who has finished well – the Lord Jesus Christ. And by His grace and for His glory, He gives us the gift of a life finished well.

Conclusion: Friends, there's something deeply compelling about a life that finishes well. It's not merely a life that begins with zeal or has moments of greatness—but it is that life, that at the end, still clings to God with steady, unshakable faith.

Psalm 41 invites us to grow into that kind of life. It is a Psalm that begins with blessing, walks through betrayal and suffering, and ends with confident trust in God's sustaining grace. Psalm 41 teaches us that a life marked by mercy, repentance, and trust in God will be sustained by Him—even through suffering—and will finish under His faithful care.

Faithfulness to Jesus is about finishing the race that is marked out for us. It is about living the abundant life. It is about thriving and flourishing, even in circumstances where it doesn't seem possible.

Verse 13 closes Psalm 41 and Book 1 with a doxology in the midst of less-than-desirable circumstances.

*Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen.*

When we read the word *blessed* at the end of Psalm 41, we should think back to Psalm 1 and Psalm 2. We should think about everything that we have read and heard preached over the last 41 Psalms. Book 1 ends in the same place it started. In a real sense, Book 1 is the story of the blessed man, Jesus Christ. He is the ideal man in Psalm 1 who never sinned. He is the only One who has ever walked faithfully in the way of the righteous because he is the Righteous One. In Psalm 2, He is the King whom God will set on the throne. By the time we get to Psalm 41, we know that the Messiah is a man who is vulnerable before His enemies. They hate Him and attack Him. Friends, the hostility and suffering He endured is not a sign of God's displeasure. You see, in spite of His suffering, or because of His suffering – He is blessed.

Listen, for the Jews, the idea of the Messiah who would suffer, be rejected, and crucified on a cross was a *stumbling block* for them. However, this is exactly the kind of Messiah that Book 1 of the Psalms teaches us to expect.¹

So, as we end Psalm 41 and close Book 1 of the Psalms, this Psalm and Book 1 end where a faithful life should end – worshipping God, because that person understands God has blessed him despite whatever circumstances he is enduring.

Friends, the mark of a life that finishes well is the person who is able to take the routine experiences of life and the difficult experiences of life, and see the shining blessing of God on those experiences. They are able to worship God through it all. They are able to say with King David:

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen.

¹ James Johnston, *Preaching the Word Series: Psalms 1 to 41, Vol. 1*, 418.