

I. Introduction to Psalms 44

If you have your Bibles this morning, I want to invite you to turn to Psalms chapter 44. As you know we have been coming through the book of Psalms verse by verse, chapter by chapter laying out everything that we need to see to help us understand the book. When we come to Psalms chapter 44 this will be one of the great doctrinal psalms on Daniel's 70th week, which will be the tribulation period. The time that Israel goes through the terrible ordeal under the antichrist that God uses to bring them back. It is based on the book of Daniel where the prophecy is given up to the first coming of Christ and then it stops and there is one week left which is seven years. That makes the seven years of the tribulation which is called Daniels 70th week—sixty-nine weeks up into Daniel, then the blank, and then the seventieth week in the tribulation.

The book of Psalms shows, as we have seen so far in Psalms 42, Psalms 43, and many other Psalms, the condition of the nation of Israel while the judgment seat of Christ is taking place up in heaven. This will be Revelation 4 and Revelation 5. But Psalms 44 will go along with Psalms 42 and Psalms 43 but it shows you something different, a different aspect that we need to not only see today, but I think we all need to learn from. Here is where the inspirational application will come through to us.

I have told you many, many times how the nation of Israel and what they go through, all through the Old Testament and certainly in the tribulation period, will always parallel to the New Testament church. We can see the things that happened to them are the same things that happen to us, even though there are thousands of years between the two. The things that they go through, but yet more importantly, why they have to go through them will be a pattern, a model, and lays out the parallels for us to understand.

Today in New Testament Christianity, we as God's people fail to see this, and therefore we find ourselves in the same condition as the nation of Israel right before they went into the captivity and beyond. In this time, because of their failure, much like New Testament Christianity, they functionally ceased to be God's people. Even though they were still God's people in name, as far as the plan of God was concerned, they were no longer functioning, only in name. This is where we find Christianity today.

If you remember your Bible, you will remember in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, it laid out for us the parallels in an incredible way that really helps you understand.

1. Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2. And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; (This is the Red Sea crossing back in the book of Exodus)

3. *And did all eat the same spiritual meat;*
4. *And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.*
5. *But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*
6. ***Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.***
7. ***Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.***
8. *Neither let us **commit fornication**, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*
9. *Neither let us **tempt Christ**, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. (This will be the book of Numbers)*
10. *Neither murmur ye, as some of them **also murmured**, and were destroyed of the destroyer.*
11. ***Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.***
12. ***Wherefore (because of what he just said) let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.***

Now, I want you to look at the list of the issues that they had. It talks about them being idolaters. It talks about them rising up and drinking and playing, not caring about anything of God. It talks about them committing fornication. It talks about them tempting Christ and murmuring. Yet, look at verse four. They were all God's people. They were made to drink of that spiritual Rock. That is a picture of Israel, but it is also a picture of us.

These are the same things that the New Testament church falls into. Yet, even though it is a picture of them and a picture of us, and they are God's people as we are, look what it says: "*But with many of them God was not well pleased.*" You will note that these things are for our examples and ensamples in verse six and verse eleven. The things that happened to them are what happens to us, and that is why he says to take heed. These things are written for our admonition, upon us whom the ends of the world are come. It is us!

I want you to see and understand today that Israel and all that they go through and went through—and more importantly, why they went through it—is a picture of what you and I face today, and what you and I will go through, and more importantly, why. So today, in 2026, we find Christianity in the state that they are in. We too can look at how Israel got into the condition they are in and know that is what happened to us.

II. Psalm 44

Let us read Psalms 44 one of the great doctrinal Psalms on the tribulation and see how the Jew—this is what I want you to see, this is what makes this Psalm different. It is a tribulation Psalm, but here we see how the Jew in the middle of that Daniel's seventieth week, in the middle of their time of trouble, how they find God and how they come back to God. **Inspirationally**, it is one of the great lessons of life: how we too can find God in the midst of the situation that Christianity finds itself in.

Let us read Psalms 44. I am going to read the whole chapter, and then we will make comments on it as we put this whole thing together. Here is what he says:

- 1. We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.*
- 2. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out.*
- 3. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.*
- 4. Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.*
- 5. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.*
- 6. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.*
- 7. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us.*
- 8. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. **Selah.***
- 9. But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies.*
- 10. Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves.*
- 11. Thou hast given us like **sheep appointed for meat**; and hast scattered us among the heathen.*
- 12. Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price.*
- 13. Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us.*
- 14. Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people.*
- 15. My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me,*
- 16. For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger.*
- 17. All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.*

18. *Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way;*
19. *Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death.*
20. *If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god;*
21. *Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.*
22. *Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.*
23. *Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever.*
24. *Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?*
25. *For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth.*
26. *Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake.*

Coming down through here, based on what we have seen so far coming through the book of Psalms, you can clearly see all the key verses here and the key words that show you the context of this as Israel in the tribulation.

First off, in **verse eight**, you need to mark "*Selah*." That always is going to be the end of the tribulation and the second coming, going into the millennium. Then you see in **verse eleven**, "*sheep appointed for meat*." This will be the Jew killed in the tribulation period.

In **verse twelve**, the Jews are actually being sold. **Verse twenty-two**, "*sheep for the slaughter*." In **verse twenty-four**, God is hiding from the Jew in the tribulation. That is Matthew 13:44. In verses **twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, and twenty-six**, they are asking God to awake, asking God to arise, to redeem them. That will be the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Remembering the Parallels between Israel & New Testament Christianity

Again, this will be a tribulation Psalm like Psalms 42, Psalms 43, and the ones we have seen so far, and many others. But in this Psalm, we see it deal with the Jew who is now in the tribulation period, and he finds God and begins to make his journey back to God for God to restore them at the second coming of Christ.

We know the tribulation breaks down seven years into two three-and-a-half-year periods. We know that. Israel today is in total apostasy, just like she will be in the first three and a half years of the tribulation period. She gets taken in by the Antichrist, goes into his fold, and believes in him. Then, as I showed you many, many times—I think last week—the last three and a half years, the Bible calls the abomination of desolation. This is where God breaks them. This is where the Antichrist turns on them. This is where, for the next three and a half years, the Holocaust of the Jew, to wipe them off the planet takes place. It is through this time that God

breaks them, and it is through this time that they come back to God, and at the second coming, they get restored and go into the millennium.

In this chapter the Jew is recognizing their sin and coming back to God. We need again to see the parallels between the nation of Israel and New Testament Christianity because I will tell you this: the way back for them will be the way back for each of us. **The key** is found in Psalms 44:1-3, going back and remembering where we came from. He says:

1 We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.

2 How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out.

3 For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them

We now see **two great keys for Israel, two great keys for us to understand. One, their history with God, where the fathers have told them, that they are listening to now that they would not listen to back then.** The second thing, the works that He did in their life before He even called them out of Egypt.

You will remember in Luke 15, you have the story of the prodigal son. I know that we use, from a practical standpoint and rightly so, the prodigal son as a picture of somebody today who gets out of fellowship with God and becomes like the prodigal son, shacking up with the pigs in the pigpen. I get that. But you want to see that primarily, that prodigal son is a picture of the nation of Israel, and they are in the far country. They were once with the Father, and then they decided that they were going to get a better deal with the world. So they left the Father and all that He had for them, and wound up in a pigpen. That is where Israel is at, but that is where so many of God's people are at today.

The key there, talking about Israel in the tribulation, is found in Luke 15:17. When this prodigal son is out there, the Bible says, "*And when he came to himself,*" he remembered what he had with the father, what he gave up and lost, and what he has now. That is a picture of Israel. Israel in the tribulation, where we are at here in this Psalm, now remembers the covenant. They remember what God has done for them, which the fathers tried to tell them, but they would not listen. They begin to see what God has for them, but more importantly, they understand what they have lost.

I have dealt with people for fifty-plus years. When you deal with a child of God who comes back to God, I find that you have two different kinds of Christians when they get right with God. The story of the prodigal son is also a picture of us. We too get into the far country with riotous living and with the pigs, so to speak. I have seen it. One type will see their sin and their need to get right with God, and that is good, and they do, praise the Lord. But the other type will not only see the error of their way from being in the far country, but also see the fact that God had a plan for them. It goes back to that unbroken chain through New Testament Christianity. They

understand now, not just, "I need to get right with God." No, no, they understand more than that. It is deeper than that. They now understand God had a plan for them. They understand the wasted years and the wasted time that God had for them, and they understand when they get it back, but they understand what they lost. I want to tell you right now, every one of us is in that boat to a certain degree. But thank God for Ephesians 5:16. You know what he says in Ephesians 5:16? You can be in that condition when you get right with God. You can redeem the time.

16. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:16

Both are good, but the second one is much better. Understanding where you are at, but also where you need to go, will always be in conjunction with you understanding where you came from. Understanding what God has done all through the lives of His people to get us to the place where we are at today, to get you here, us together.

I have told you many, many times, it is no accident that you are here today. It is no accident that you are part of this church. I think the great tragedy of God's people is that they only look at a snapshot of their Christian life. They never see the hand of God that guided them through life to get them where God wanted them to be so they could get the right Bible, get the right training, and get the right teaching to fulfill God's plan for their lives. The hand of God is in our lives even before we are saved, like Israel.

You know what he told Israel in verse three? He told Israel in verse three that God had a favor for them. When you see that, it bonds and cements your decision to come back to God based on your understanding of His hand in your life. I want to talk today about this Psalm, but I want to talk to you along with that about God's favor in your life.

IV. The Unbroken Chain Of Bible Truth

Today, this is where Israel is at. They are in the far country. But just like Luke 15 the prodigal son, they came to themselves, and they remember what their fathers had told them. They remember the covenant that God made with them through Moses and Elijah.

This is where it becomes real for me in my life. You see, it is one thing to get right with God and get back in fellowship with Him, but it is something else, much deeper, when you come back to God and see what He had for you and what you walked away from. Now you see His overall hand in your life, and you begin to understand what it means in verse three when they had favor—God had favor for the nation of Israel.

The story of my own life is how God's hand got me to the place and the plan that He had for me. I use my life because I know my life better than anybody else, but I am telling you right now, you are sitting out there, and every one of you has your own story. The question is, do you really understand it? As David said in verse one, our fathers, what they had told us back in the day—the men God put into our lives through the years. Then the second thing: the work that God did in our life, my life, through those men in times of old. God did me a favor when I did not deserve it.

You see, when you understand this, when you understand that before we were even saved, before we even understood what God was doing, when we were in the far country, God began to put

into your life and my life the things that got us in the right direction because God did us a favor. Once you understand that, why are God's people so indifferent that they refuse to return the favor? Because they do not know. They do not understand. When I consider all that He did for me personally to get me here, through the good times and the bad times, I have a better understanding of Romans 8:28.

28. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

A couple of weeks ago, we saw the impact of three men that spanned the twentieth century. I talked about Billy Sunday. I talked about J. Frank Norris, and I talked about Peter S. Ruckman. How they shaped the course of Christianity through our own time of apostasy today, where Christianity is just like the nation of Israel. They not only shaped the course of Christianity, but they blazed a path of Bible truth. They laid the foundation for every Bible-believing church, every Bible-believing Christian that is out there.

The real tragedy, as I see it, is that there are churches out there that believe the Bible is the Word of God. There are Christians out there that have the right Bible and have the real truth, but the tragedy is they do not know how they got it.

Christianity is a lot like all of us as far as human individuals. Everybody here had a mother and a father. Then you had a grandmother and a grandfather. Then they had a great-grandfather and a great-grandmother. Then they had a great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great, all the way back to where? Does anybody here really know where you really came from to get you here as a person? You know your mom and your dad. You know your grandma. How many generations can you go back before it all gets lost in the fog of history? Some of you may have royalty in your line, physically speaking. Some of you may have Billy the Kid, or one of the gangsters in your line. I have got to keep an eye on a couple of you for that!

But you see, you are sitting in this room physically, but you do not know how you got here past your mother. That is the problem with Christians today. They have the right Bible, and they are in a good Bible-believing, Bible-preaching church with a good Bible-believing pastor. They sit there every Sunday to get the Bible down, but they do not know how they got there.

I took a couple of weeks ago to show you those three men who blazed the path through the twentieth century. But to me, what is so amazing is that not only did these three guys blaze a path of truth, yet these three men never knew each other. They never met. They never had their ministries cross paths. They span over a hundred years of the twentieth century, coming out of the nineteenth century into the twenty-first, yet they never met. They never knew each other. They never corresponded. They never preached in meetings together.

But if you look carefully, you can see God's hand in preparing each one of them by using each one differently. Through His hand in their lives, they dovetailed their work together so you could have the complete, perfect, absolute Word of God.

But out of those three men, "our fathers," in verse one—and I cannot speak for you, and I am not intending to speak for you—but out of those three men and what God did with them, God

reached down into the sea of humanity and plucked me out of it. As the Bible says in Psalms 40:2-3:

2. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

3. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Psalms 40:2-3

You see, God did me a favor. Verse one: "*what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.*" The greatest favor God ever did for me, and for you too—how God put me in the unbroken chain of Bible truth. Long before I ever understood it, or knew what God was doing with me, using things, men, people, and circumstances to get me to the point in my life where I would leave the far country, leave this world, and follow Him.

V. Running From God's Plan

Looking back to the beginning of the twentieth century, in the 1920s, when J. Frank Norris came out of the Southern Baptist Convention, most people do not see this. They have no understanding of it, but a new era was born in New Testament Christianity. America had slid into incredible apostasy. But through him coming out of the Southern Baptist Convention and doing what he did, God began to call out His remnant in the next thirty years. The men that He invested in, raised up, and trained were the next two generations of pastors across this country who, while it was going into apostasy and dumping the Bible and doing all they were doing, held true to the Word of God.

This is where it becomes personal for me. I cannot speak for you. You will have to research your own story. One of those men that J. Frank Norris took under his wing and trained, teaching him how to preach, was a young man by the name of Harold Henniger. He was sent out by Norris to Canton, Ohio, to start a church. That church became the Canton Baptist Temple. It was at the corner of Fifteenth Street and Alden Avenue. If you want to have some fun on some boring, rainy afternoon, get on your computer, go to Google Maps, Google it, and the church is still there.

My mom and dad moved to Canton during World War II. My cousin, Darlene, is listening this morning, I am sure. We visited there many, many times. My mom and dad were born in Frostburg, Maryland. I know this sounds like the old stories here. My dad was born in a log cabin. I saw the log cabin years ago. I was just a little guy. I am sure it is not there anymore, but he was born in a log cabin. No light, no electricity, no nothing. Just as primitive as you could think.

They moved to Canton, Ohio, to get a job. My mom worked at the Timken Roller Bearing Company. She made ammunition. My dad went to work at Republic Steel. They bought a house right on the corner of Fifteenth Street and Alden Avenue. If you go to the church, right across the street there is a house, 1451 Alden Avenue, right across the street from that church. God was moving, and I was not even born yet. But He was going to do me the greatest favor He ever did in my life, just like He did for the nation of Israel.

My mom and dad got saved. They were won to Christ by the associate pastor. His name was Ronnie Cannon. Ronnie Cannon at some point left the Canton Baptist Temple and started a church down in Lima, Ohio. We have guys over there preaching this morning at Victory Baptist. The pastor there was out of Ronnie Cannon's church in Lima, and Ronnie Cannon won him to Christ. The same Ronnie Cannon led my mom and dad to Christ. You cannot make this stuff up!

When my mom and dad got saved we started going to church. My sister, Sharon, she is watching this morning. Sharon, I remember when you got saved. I remember you going down in the old church building there, right across the street. I remember you going down. I remember the wooden pews. I remember the lady that opened up the Bible. You were crying. Mom was crying. I cried because I did not know what everybody was crying about. I did not know what was going on, I was just a little guy. Shortly after that, I went down and got saved.

Some seventy years later, I can look back and see God's hand and His work of old in my life and see God doing the greatest favor for me that He could have ever done. But as I have told you many, many times, God moves and the devil moves. So when I was eight or nine—I do not know how old, right around there someplace—my mom and dad stopped going to church. Something happened. My mom and dad got mad and never went back to church; they quit going. It could not have been the fact that it was too far to drive because it was right across the street.

My mom still got me up, dressed me, and sent me across the street to church. But rule number one: you do not send your kid to church. You have got to take them as a family.

By the time I was in my teens, I cared nothing about going to church either. I too was like the nation of Israel. I walked away from God, forgetting all that He had done for me. Like that prodigal son in Luke 15, I now was in the far country. But God was not done with me.

Just to let me step out of my story for a minute: I do not care where you are at today. God is not done with you. Now, maybe in my mind I was done with Him, and maybe in your mind you are done with Him. But in His mind, He was far from being done with me.

I remember I was thirteen or fourteen years old. I do not really remember how I got there, but I went to a youth activity. It was a skating activity at a roller-skating place, held by the youth group of the Canton Baptist Temple. I was a mess by then. But that day, I met the man that, years later, God was going to have for me to give me everything I needed to be everything God wanted me to be.

His name was Mel Sabaka. He was over all of the youth there at the Canton Baptist Temple, and they put on this skating activity. Here is the connection: as Harold Henniger was one of J. Frank Norris' boys, Mel Sabaka was one of Ruckman's boys. Ah, that unbroken chain. Ruckman gave Mel his Bible. They were lifelong friends for sixty-plus years until they both died and went home to be with the Lord.

There I was at the skating activity. This was my first meeting with the man, Mel Sabaka, my father in the Lord, who was going to get me where God wanted me to be. Having said that, the first meeting did not go very well. Everybody was skating, and I was over at the pinball machine

playing the pinballs. Mel saw me over there. Back then pinball machines were like Sodom and Gomorrah, I guess. I do not know. Christians did not play pinball machines for whatever reason.

So you know what Mel did? I am over there having a ball, shaking the thing to get the little balls going into the right hole. He walks up, pulls the plug, walks over to me, and says, "Son, don't waste your time and your money on this kind of stuff." That was my first encounter.

Well, looking back, that could have gone better. I mean, I am just a little guy. He pulls the plug, I have just lost my nickel, and I am thinking to myself, "Who is this guy?" I said it a little differently back then, but I am giving you the cliff notes. Who is this guy?

Over the next two or three years, I never went back. But God never gave up on me because God had a favor for me. He had a plan for me. You know what that plan was? It was you. It was Kansas City. It was every one of you that are here this morning, part of this work in the unbroken biblical chain from Ruckman to J. Frank to Billy Sunday. God was after me like He was after Israel, and I was running the other way. I was in the far country.

Some time passes. Oh, I am probably fourteen or fifteen now. Back then, the churches—some of you older folks remember this—the churches on one night of the week had what they called a visitation program. Remember that? For those of you that do not know, let me enlighten you. Visitation was on a certain night of the week. Back then, it was Tuesday. The church would meet together, and they would hand out cards to everybody to visit people who were delinquent in coming to church, to try to get them to come back to church. The churches do not do that anymore. I mean, can you imagine in Kansas City at ten o'clock, nine-thirty at night, knocking on somebody's door? You are going to get killed. But they did it back then.

Every Tuesday night, between six-thirty and seven, they would come to my house. Young teenage kids out of the youth department. Mel would send them to me to try to get me to come back to church. Now, to say I was less than spiritual at that point was an understatement. Tuesday night at seven o'clock, the old movie *Combat* was on. I loved it. Nothing irritated me more than just sitting down watching it come on, and guess who was at the front door knocking.

But I had a plan. You think Jacob was a schemer? He did not hold a candle to me. I was on to them. We did not have any DVRs to record it back then. If you missed it, you missed it. So every Tuesday night, I got even. The moment I saw those cars pull up, I was out the back door. I got into the field and the woods behind me, and told my mom to tell them I was not home—which I wasn't.

Well, one Tuesday night, they pulled up out front. I headed out the back door. I got out that back door, closed that back door, turned around, and guess who was standing right there. You guessed it: Mel Sabaka.

But this time, he was kind. He told me he missed me. He asked me to come back to church. He told me he loved me. He told me God loved me. You know, I was in the far country, and I did to him what most of God's people do when you try to talk to them today. We all have our standard answers that we do not intend to keep. I remember saying, "Mel, I'll be there Sunday." Now, he

probably knew I was not going to be there. I knew I was not going to be there. I had no intention of going.

You see, God not only saw His plan in my life, but it was God's hand that I see now today, and the works of old in my life that He did. God had a favor for me. I am telling you my story, but every one of you has your own story. God has a favor for every one of you, just like me. I am no better than you; you are no better than me. God pulled you out of the sea of humanity for whatever reason and allowed you to be put here. You could be a Jehovah's Witness this morning. You could be a Mormon this morning. You could be a Catholic this morning. You could be an evangelical this morning, so screwed up in your Bible. But God did you a favor.

Time passed. Now I was eighteen or nineteen, around 1968, and I enlisted in the Army. I loved the Army. I liked the structure. I loved the discipline. I understood the chain of command. I seriously thought about making it a career, but little did I know that God had other plans to get me into another Army.

Then one day, I got a letter from my mom that my dad was dying of lung cancer. In the course of time—I got out of the Army and went home. Shortly after, my dad went home to be with the Lord.

Little did I know what a pivotal point this was in my life. I was in the far country, but that story of Luke 15 is so real to me because when I was living with the pigs, my Father was standing at the gate looking for me to come back. I may have given up on Him. You may have given up on Him. He will never give up on you. He has got a favor for you. God had a plan for me, and He was far from done with me.

My dad going home was the beginning of my wake-up call. I loved my dad. My dad was a good man. I think about him a lot, and my mom too. My greatest joy was that my mom got to hear me preach, but my greatest regret in life was that my dad never got to hear me preach.

After my dad went home to be with the Lord, my mom and I would go for walks at night. She wanted to go back to church, so I took her. That Sunday morning, she went to Pastor Henniger's main service, and guess where I wound up? Mel Sabaka's college and career class. Except he did not preach that morning. An old Philadelphian warhorse by the name of Tommy Thomas preached that morning.

The hand of God was orchestrating every event in my life, and I was at a pivotal point. I sat in the back because I knew how those crazy Baptists are. Old Tommy Thomas was an old, saved gangster out of the Prohibition era. He got the right Book and ran the Brown Street Mission, just like where you are going to preach.

I will never forget that morning. Mel introduced him, and he came up and said, "I want to talk to you today about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." His voice was booming just like that. He said, "I want to talk to you today about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the question every man and woman in this room needs to ask today: **Are you ready?**"

When he said that, he reached over, grabbed his chest, slid over to the side, and said, "**Are you ready?**" Then he was down on the ground. The last thing he said, with all the strength he had left in his body before he went home to be with the Lord, pointing that finger with as loud as he could say it: "**Are you ready?**" He died and went home to be with the Lord.

You can imagine what happened after that. Mel picked up and finished the sermon. I do not even know what he said. I went out of there understanding two things. One, the last thing he said with that finger, he was pointing at me. The second thing was, I was not ready. That did it for me.

I teach you guys about the seven great awakenings in America's history. Remember, from the colonial days up to the 1950s, the seven great awakenings? Well, to be totally honest with you, there is an eighth one, mine! That day was the great awakening of my life. That day, heaven came down and glory filled my soul and I understood.

It was at that point in my life, like the nation of Israel, I began to see that God did me a favor. I realized all that God had done for me. To this day, verse one: "what our fathers have told us," and the work of old in my life, I knew now that God had a plan for my life, and I went back. But more importantly, I never looked back. I understood. I understood that God had done me the greatest favor in my life, and I just did not know how I could not—listen to me—I just did not know how I could not return that favor.

I hesitate to tell you guys this because I have chewed you guys out for some of the same stuff that I used to do, but I was pretty radical when I first got saved. You see, for me—and I do not know how it is for you—there is never a halfway in anything. I am either all in or all out. There is no middle ground in my world. That can be a problem sometimes, you know. That can be a problem because people like to live in that middle ground. It really does not exist, and I do not have a lot of patience and tolerance for that. I do pretty good with it; I just mask what I really want to say! But I am telling you right now, I knew me, and I knew I could not go halfway with this.

I worked at the Hoover Company. I left on that Friday just like every unsaved guy in that place. When I went back on Monday morning, I showed up with a fistful of tracts and a Bible, and I never looked back.

Some of the stupid things I did! I looked for every opportunity to witness to people. I drove a fork truck. A fork truck runs on that gas that you put in the big cylinders, and it blows really hot air out the back. I would be driving parts, and I would swing around to put the parts in, and the people that were working over here would get the blast. There was nothing else to do if you wanted the part—I am sorry! I would swing that around, and all the women would yell, and the guys would say, "Hey, hey, hey!" they would get hit with that hot gas coming out. But I had to get the part. I thought to myself, "What an opportunity." So, right over by the gas tank, I put a sign that said, "If you think this is hot, wait until you die and go to hell!" How far do you think I got with that?

I would go to work. We had to be in at seven o'clock. There were gates that would not let you in until seven. I would stand out there. I remember the first time I stood out there, there must have

been seventy-five people. I said, "Folks, you all know me. I'm your friendly fork truck driver. You call me on the line when you need parts; I'm always there. I try to make sure you make your money, and I know that my getting your parts ensures that. You know I've always tried to take care of you. I just want to let you know today that last week I got right with God, and I want you to know it was the greatest time of my life. It is going to make me a lot better, and it is going to make me a better fork truck driver because now I understand. I would just like to give you all a tract." I did that because I knew me. If I did not go out the door and make the biggest splash that I could, I would not make it. I am no middle-ground guy. I am sorry. Maybe you are. Praise the Lord if you are. If it works for you, fine. I cannot. I am all in or all out.

I went back, and I now understood. I saw what my fathers had done. I saw the hand of God at work, how He orchestrated everything in my life—the favor that He did for me. I thought to myself, after the investment He made in me for twenty-some years, how could I ever go back to the world again? Like the nation of Israel in Psalms 44 they remembered the covenant. I remembered what God had done for me, the price of my salvation.

Now, some fifty-plus years later, here I am, and yet here we are, all because of the fathers and all because of the works in my life. I tell you my story because each one of you has your own story. Yours will be different than mine, but if you are honest, you will find those two same ingredients in your story as in mine: God had a plan for your life, God wanted to do something for you, and He orchestrated everything in your life to get you to a place in a church with a pastor where you can have the truth.

Not everybody likes my preaching. Not everybody likes me. Not everybody likes my ministry. I understand that. But what you do not understand is that I am doing you the greatest favor, outside of the greatest favor that God ever did for you, by giving you the truth. That is the difference.

➤ Do We Understand the Favor that God did for us?

We have got to ask the question today: Why you? Why me? The answer is simple: God saw something in each of you. **The real issue is, do you see it in yourself? Do you understand the favor that God did for you?** You too, if you can see Psalms 44 in your own life—the investment of God in you before we were even saved—you too will never be the same, and you will allow God to finish what He started in your life. Yet, like the nation of Israel, some will just walk away into the far country.

God has a plan for you, for each of you, just like me. Philippians 1:6 says:

6. Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Philippians 1:6

The key to you fulfilling God's plan is the confidence that you have in that plan. The only way you can have the confidence to complete that plan is to see how God did you a favor—the greatest favor anyone could ever do. The fathers that He has put into your life, the men and women who have tried to guide you in the right way, and the work of God in your life. That is how He has orchestrated everything to get you right here where you can get the truth, and then

do something with it. The most important thing is this: **do you see the favor that God did for you in that?**

VI. Four Important Lessons of Life

Out of my life's experience—my time in the far country, coming back to God, and fifty-plus years of doing the best I could—I have learned four important lessons of life. As far as I am concerned, this is what allowed me, in spite of myself, to get to where God has me today, right in the middle of God's plan for my life.

1. The Foreknowledge of God

The first thing was my understanding of the foreknowledge of God. In Jeremiah 1:1-10, you see that before Jeremiah was born, God said:

5. Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Jeremiah 1:5

I began to understand and learn through the lessons, good or bad, that God had a plan for me long before I was even conceived. He saw me when nobody else did. In His heart and His mind, He not only saw me, but He saw you. He put everything in my path to get me to where He wanted me to go. Free will? Absolutely. I could have rejected it and walked away from it, just like so many of God's people reject it and walk away from it. The difference is, when I got right with God, I saw the favor, verse three.

2. All Things Work Together for Good

The second thing: I knew, looking back at Romans 8:28, all things work together for good.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

I saw the good, and not just the blessings of God, but I saw the good in the chastising hand of God in my life. I realized that the key to it all was not just did I learn from the good things and from the bad things. But learning the lessons of life with God or not learning them without God. It brought me to the place in my life to better understand what I love when I choose to go from the far country.

3. The Man of God in Your Life

The third thing, and I think about this as probably the most important: I look back at the man of God that He put in my life. From my first meeting when I was just a kid—which did not go

well—to that day in his class when Tommy Thomas pointed his finger at me. From that point on, that man became the Apostle Paul of my life.

I saw it then all through the Bible. Joshua had Moses. Caleb had Joshua. Jonathan had David. Timothy had Paul. John Mark had Barnabas. Titus and Philemon had Paul. And I had Mel Sabaka. It made all the difference in the world like over in John 1:6, it says:

6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. John 1:6

For me, there was a man sent from God whose name was Mel. He was the man who taught me to love the Book. He was the man who taught me the Word of God, the man who gave me the Word of God, the man who disciplined me and taught me structure, accountability, and how to endure hardness. He showed me what ministry really is—that it is people. Through his example, he was my mentor and my leader, the Apostle Paul of my life.

I learned that God will put a man in your life to get you to the place of total commitment. But again, so many people will trade it all for the far country, walking away from God or walking away from the man that God put into your life, right into the fields of the fatherless. Mel was not perfect. No one ever is. Somebody said, "Well, he wasn't perfect." You are right, **but he was perfect for me.** He was exactly what I needed, and God knew that, just as Pete Ruckman was right for him. As that line that goes down, he was God's man in my life. He took what God started, and then he developed it. He built me not around the Book, but he built me through the Book.

4. The Favor of God

Then the last thing, the fourth thing that I learned: the incredible fact, the unbelievable truth, that God did me a favor. It is in verse three where Israel says it was not by their own hand that they came out of Egypt, but God's right arm—Jesus Christ—His hand. It was not by my own strength and my own power, but it was the light of His countenance because thou hadst a favor unto them

When we look back and we understand the favor that God has showed us, how do we walk away? The favor of God!

I know a lot of your stories, not all of the details of them, but you do. Now that I have laid that out and showed you Israel going through what they went through, and where it applied to my life, I am telling every one of you: you are like where it says in the Bible—I think it is Psalms 90:9—that our lives are spent as a tale that is told.

*For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.
Psalms 90:9*

Everyone in this room, if you are saved—even if you are not saved—God has orchestrated everything in your life. He did you the greatest favor anybody could ever do by getting you to a place where you got the complete, perfect Word of God in your life. Where you have the opportunity now to reach the world and for God to fulfill in your life the plan that, just like

Jeremiah, He had for you before you were formed in your mother's womb. Foreknowledge, yet foreknowledge; free will.

VII. Summary

I think the most tragic thing on the planet for God's people is for God to have the foreknowledge of what He wants to do with each one of us, and we simply say, "No thanks," and move into the far country.

This is one of the greatest practical Psalms. When I first read it years and years ago, long after I got right with the Lord, I saw myself in it. I told myself, someday I will preach that. I put a little note in my Bible: "Someday I'll preach that," because that is me right there. God's favor in my life. And you know what? **How, after all of that—and I will speak for you now—how, after all of that, do you and I not return the favor?**