

Intro (walk out carrying a baseball bat)

turn with me too: **Psalm 77**

We’re continuing in our series Greater Than... (God is > than our disappointments)

Q ever been disappointed before?...*(ask audience/hands...)*

T as we go thru life – we face disappt. / disappts come in all shapes/degrees...

→ how many of you: (of not liking the food you ordered; leaving the house only to realize you have 3 inflated tires, where you used to have 4... boarding the plane to realize you’ve got the middle seat on the 9 hr flight;

This psalm 77 is a lament...the psalmist (Asaph) is distressed, battling some disappointment, some discouragement...musing through his emotions, searching for hope and only finding silence...he’s feeling hopeless, abandoned, alone – unable to sleep, unable to speak, disillusioned...he’s so disappointed...

Q ever been there?

ST (I remember it like it was yesterday)...

it was a summer evening, the breeze was sweeping across the field & carrying the dust thru the air...the folding chairs lined the backstop, the players chattered and kicked the dirt, it was the bottom of the 7th (we only went 7 innings)...and I was up to bat. At age 10, this was the moment of all moments...*(in the back of mind, I can hear soundtrack Whitney Houston’s “one moment in time” song)* nervous and with my heart pounding thru my chest...it quickly grew to a 2-2 count and then the moment arrived...the pitch was thrown, my bat was swung and the ball made that popping sound in the cradle of the catchers glove...the umps voice echoed that dreaded word: ‘out’ – it was a swing and a miss - moment over, game over, disappointment crossed my path... I was so discouraged – so disappointed – so distraught...you could see it all over me...

As we walked back to the car, exiting the ball field, with my head hung low – my parents uttered four words to me that instantly melted my disappointment; my spirit’s lifted and I suddenly felt alive again; as they looked at me and said:

“How about Dairy Queen?”

(pause)

→it’s amazing how ice cream can wash away disappointment at age 10?

Disappointments can get biggie sized too , can’t they?:

- One day you’re let go from your job
- The child you have highest dreams for – is short-circuiting, caught up in grip of drugs; or just wandering and you don’t know how to help...
- The relationship you searched for and found, is suddenly severed & gone
- The disease that is not supposed to happen to you – begins knocking on your door
- The ambitions you had for your life, feel like they keep disappearing 1 at a time...

Some disappointments in life are simple – they hurt for a moment, then we overcome them

→Other’s seem to quickly overtake and overwhelm us...

And you know what... all the ice cream in the world can’t wash it away... (humor musing:)
maybe it helps for a moment...especially those DQ Blizzards (I mean they’re candy & ice cream: power combo!)

They say: *discouragement is the common cold of emotions* – and we will all catch it from time to time...disappointments will cross my path – it will cross yours...

Some disappointments we cause ourselves b/c of faulty thinking or unrealistic expectations
(*I think of some of the weird expectations we have in relationships, marriages at times*)

Some disappointments are handed to us on a platter that we didn't order...thru someone else they get delivered and served...

No matter –the cause – or who you are → the reality is we will face disappointment
(no one is immune) @ some point in life – we all begin singing the blues...

T and in psalm 77, we see Asaph recording his blues song...(in ps 73, struggling with doubt...now w/ disappointment/discouragement greatly – don't know completely what it is)

→ Probably written when Israel was in exile (587-538 b.c. and beyond) – some scholars suggest that this psalm might have been an individual representation of a community lament of those in exile...

→ but Asaph is clearly struggling

→ the psalm has diverse motifs, - with musings about God and his feelings, but he doesn't have a formal petition to God until half way thru

Listen to his feelings:

Psalm 77:1-3

What I appreciate about this Psalm and all the Psalms in general is that they are poems, songs, a collection of prayers from 2500 yrs ago that teach us **we can be real with God.**

God doesn't desire tame and sanitized prayer life with Him – the Psalms are guiding us toward being respectful – but none the less: raw and real with God...God is never upset with us being real with him...it is what He desires in every season of life

T life has these seasons to it, it has these cycles: things don't always stay on an up note do they...no, sometimes the chorus of good times gets drowned out by the bridge of the blues... and disappointment begins to sing louder... (there is that saying: "what's up, must come down" and there seems to be that cycle in life...

Cycles to life...

Elijah's example (1 Kings 18-19)

- Elijah stands up for God – experiences this miraculous thing at Mt Carmel (prophets of Baal)
- Get's this death threat from King's wife (jezebel) and he runs away fearing for his life
- As he's musing things over – wanting to die – feeling totally defeated, discouraged – God sends some angels – bakes him a dinner...encourages him...

1 Kings 19:4-9

1 Kings 19:4

Even as Elijah is facing/wrestling with his disappointment – God is actively involved...

Disappointments will cross your path –

(Q) is: how will they shape you? sometimes you can only learn a few of life's lessons as you enroll in the school of the desert...Elijah is getting ready to learn more of God, but it only happens as he's dealing/wrestling with his discouragement...

Ill/story: *story of carrot/coffee in boiling pots – how their changed or do the changing...maybe?*

T we know that disappointments will come – there inevitable in these cycles of life...that's why **Asaph is right back here again** – struggling just 4 Psalms past the last struggle moment he had...(ps 73-ps77)

we need to address it as it comes... b/c not treated in a healthy way - **disappointment left alone, left un-dealt with; tends to spiral emotionally within us...**

Psalm 77:3-4 (Asaph is in this spiral within)

Spiral of disappointment

→ disapt → discouraged → depression → despair (this place of an absence of hope)

...and you can get Stuck there if you're not careful

- Certainly there can be causes of depression chemically within the body (*see a doctor*), but often disappointment (if we allow our perspective to focus solely on it) and we don't deal with it in a healthy way - can spiral into greater & greater harm...on it's own...
- how many people have you watched around you – that you simply can say they've become stuck in life...emotionally unable to move...

Q have you ever gotten stuck – trapped somewhere, hand in cookie jar; stuck in something?...
→ one of my favorite pictures (kid stuck in school chair)...

Ill:

-ever gotten stuck while caving? (I almost got stuck in the desert museum little cave trail)

-stood on beach and watch your feet get buried by the tide deeper n deeper

-buried yourself in sand – hard to get out on your own...

-met someone this wk who's actually been stuck in quicksand

-any ever gotten stuck in the sand/dirt with your car?

Q ever been stuck? – share your story if you have one with the person next to ya...maybe you watched as someone was stuck...

my story: *wasn't in manly way: truck in the sand...or parachuting, stuck in tree...*

how I got stuck trying on wetsuit top in CA a couple yrs ago...so embarrassing – freak out moment (fear, alone, nervous) – praying within this cave of neoprene for the Lord to rescue and He seemed very silent...finally made it out (w/out having to go out and ask for help)...

- I got stuck in that suit...
- Often we can become stuck in life...(and it's definitely not as comical)

Disappt is an emotion that as it spirals w/in us can get us to being stuck emotionally, feeling like things are never going to change, even though we desperately desire them too...and often in that spiral we can get so focused on our situation – questioning: where is God in the midst of this circumstance?

...instead of recognizing and remembering that God is over all circumstances – He’s with us in the midst – we can get stuck in spiral – **and we can lose focus that He is > than that disappt...**

(pause)

T (Asaph) feels stuck; his focus has gotten so swallowed up by his circumstances and his disappointment – that he’s questioning, struggling (he’s used the pronoun “I” 9 times in opening paragraph...) his focus has gotten consumed by his circumstances...
...disappoint can raise some honest, troubling questions...

Psalm 77:7-9

BIGGEST Q: God are you truly > my disappointment ?

T and it’s at that moment – Asaph changes his perspective – He moves his focus – he’s still emotionally there, **but He begins practicing the discipline of remembering & this is the hinge point in this lament** – this is the thing we need to grab a hold of today...for you...for me → **REMEMBERING** (changing our perspective – adjusting our focus off of the disappointment and refocusing on the ONE who is > than!)

Psalm 77:10-12

He starts remembering the greatest redemptive act of God’s involvement that he could think of... “the exodus / rescue of his people”

Psalm 77: 11; 16, 19-20

T often when we’re alone in our disappointment, we’re wondering where God is – is He at work? Asaph begins remembering...God has been at work before, God has proven himself to be present & active...

(you remember the story of the exodus...)

- *They’ve been in slavery over 400 yrs – cry out for help*
- *God gets involved – miracles left and right to get this million person march on the way*
- *Get to this body of water that they can’t go around – Egyptian army closing behind ‘em*
- *In the midst of that discouraging moment – God does something so amazing to encourage them and rescue them...He gets involved – He’s active in the moment...*

→don’t stop there - NOW fast forward in that story...

(tell story of 40 yrs later – there is another body of water that stands before this group)

(Joshua 3-4) (*synopsis*) (*waiting 40 yrs, flood stage water, disappointment, questioning*)...

Joshua 3:15-16

Scholars say that the town of ADAM was 19 miles upstream... out of eyesight

They couldn't see what God was up too ...they had to face their disappointment/discouragement and trust! They had to turn their attention away from the roaring river and focus on the ONE who created that river... they had to walk forward and pin their HOPE on the LORD...

And God proved once again: HE was > than!

All they could see was the Jordan river – but God was at work upstream...

(pause)

Friends, we need reminded, refreshed to know: → that even when we're facing our disappointments and it seems that He is silent or absent – and our disappointment seems to be the only thing we can see: **God is at work upstream!**

T I was reminded of this again this week by a family, a friend who is facing some disappointment on a grand scale...yet this family's perspective is clearly fixed on the ONE who is > than any disappointment...

The Jackson's story:

Mom and Dad have been facing some health issues for well over a decade, finally getting an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan over the last year (savings acct gets drained), but all along the way of treatment they have seen God's hand of provision (in tangible ways) → their insurance guy (who doesn't believe in God) just telling them recently that he's never in 20 yrs seen an insurance company cover what they're getting covered – it's a miracle)

They said it's been a trying and difficult yr: not only battling and struggling thru their own healing, but just a month ago to find out their young adult son had cancer...aggressive. Think of the shock of that disappointment washing over them and their son. Son's undergone surgery at Mayo clinic in PHX...starting to turn a corner...

They were telling me how a couple wks ago – starting to really fret again, question → husband walking around at work praying, searching...gets knock on his door at the fire station – someone there to see him and it's a crew from another station who's got a ice chest full of food for their time being with their son in PHX – an envelop stuffed with money to help them...go up that night and hear their son say his first words since the surgery...

→ husband said: "I've heard it a million times: but until you go thru this, you don't understand How Big God is; How intimate God is – how much He cares and we're learning to trust him no matter the situation"...

→wife said: "God has his people everywhere! He meets all your needs (financial, emotional, logistical, spiritual – I am just seeing Him at work all around me → my faith is stretched, but strengthened"

God's at work upstream...

Read Ben's note (read out loud)

God is at work upstream ...

→ God's heart – is to always lead us out of disappointment, toward HOPE
 ...the Scriptures continually remind us to stay anchored to God's HOPE...in any and all situations, in times where He feels close and active and in those times where there seems to be distant and silent...

God is truly greater than ... and He's always at work upstream

It's what Jesus whispers to his friends as they're facing some discouragement – their situation is changing – they're unsure what the future will hold...there is just 12 of them...things are unsettled...

John 16:33

→ Jesus is saying – trust me (I got this) – I'm greater than > → hang all your hope on me

T Hope is a powerful thing – but you gotta be able to trust what you're putting your hope in

(cut?)

Did you read about the poor Pittsburgh man, who was struggling financially: put all his hope in a scheme he dreamed up that would meet his needs...so he went to work on his plan of forgery...figured out what grocery store he'd walk into to use this forged bill – to get the change that would change his life... problem was all his hope was pinned on cashing (not a \$100 bill, not a \$1,000 bill, not a \$10,000 bill, but a \$1,000,000 bill he made at his house)... not sure, what he was thinking that this wouldn't attract attention, or that grocery stores probably can't change that, or that there is no such thing as a million dollar bill (highest is \$100)...he probably had soaring hopes of what life would be like when this worked – but it didn't work out...

Assoc press / yahoo news 10-9-07 (preachingtoday.com)

→He had pinned all his hope on something that had no chance of coming through...

You see: where you put your hope matters, WHO you put your hope in – really matters!

Asaph comes to realize and be reminded that God is able to handle our disappointments – b/c God is greater than – He is the ultimate source of Hope...He can be trusted when things are shaky, He has proven Himself dependable... (so he writes this in ps 77)

Psalm 77:13-14

Conclusion:

Asaph is realizing God is greater than

The Jackson family is realizing that God is greater than...and you can too!

Asaph – begins the discipline of remembering: remembering the deeds of God, His Character → his actions and His words...

→He's remembering that all HOPE pinned on God never disappoints...

today I'd like for us lean into that: lean into God's character, into His Word ...

Maybe you've been really struggling with disappointment, discouragement – distress in life has been a heavy burden... → truth be told: you're tired, spent, -- you're feeling like Asaph did, questioning, wondering, struggling with the silence...

Today, I invite you - *as we move along in worship – **to sit with your hands open to your Father – open to God*** – allow your heart to adopt a renewed focus on Him and not the circumstances that surround you

...listen and glean from His Word – His heart for you...be embraced by this moment...His Hope
→ As you engage – allow your heart to say:

...God, help me adjust my perspective

...Father refresh me as I **remember YOU** – for all you are, and all you've done & can do

...God show me anything you're trying to shape in me as face life's disappointments

...let me be encouraged again to know that you're at work upstream...(maybe I can't cu, but I trust that you're at work upstream...)

Larry is going to come to lead us in some closing worship – but let these Scriptures wash over you, join in on the songs when you're ready...allow this space for you and your Creator to connect...

Closing transitional prayer

(as worship team comes to lead us in a couple songs and scripture roll on screen)

closing meditation thru scriptures...

Ps 42:11 (tniv)

Ps 62:5 (tniv)

1 Peter 5:7 (nlt)

Ps 33: 20-22 (nlt)

Eph 1:18-19a (nlt) ends with words “19 I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him.”

2 Thess 2:16-17 (tniv)

Deut. 31:8 (tniv)

Rom 8: 38-39 (tniv)

Jn 16:33 (tniv)

Isa 40:30-31 (tniv)

Eph 3:20-21 (tniv)

2 songs of worship

Closing thought:

May you sense in a new way that God truly is >

May you be reminded that God is at work “upstream” in your life

May you live with renewed hope...in Him