

Date of sermon: 6/6/2020
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Psalm 74
Title of sermon: **God, I Have A Complaint**
Series: Don't Settle for Normal - #1

Psalm 74 - NIV:

1 O God, why have you rejected us forever? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? **2** Remember the nation you purchased long ago, the people of your inheritance, whom you redeemed— Mount Zion, where you dwelt. **3** Turn your steps toward these everlasting ruins, all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary. **4** Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards as signs. **5** They behaved like men wielding axes to cut through a thicket of trees. **6** They smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatchets. **7** They burned your sanctuary to the ground; they defiled the dwelling place of your Name. **8** They said in their hearts, "We will crush them completely!" They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land. **9** We are given no signs from God; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be. **10** How long will the enemy mock you, God? Will the foe revile your name forever? **11** Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them! **12** But God is my King from long ago; he brings salvation on the earth. **13** It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. **14** It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave it as food to the creatures of the desert. **15** It was you who opened up springs and streams; you dried up the ever-flowing rivers. **16** The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon. **17** It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter. **18** Remember how the enemy has mocked you, Lord, how foolish people have reviled your name. **19** Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts; do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever. **20** Have regard for your covenant, because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land. **21** Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace; may the poor and needy praise your name. **22** Rise up, O God, and defend your cause; remember how fools mock you all day long. **23** Do not ignore the clamor of your adversaries, the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.

Hey, let's move into a new series! It's called, "Don't Settle for Normal." Well, where'd this title come from? Because, the term "unprecedented" has now given way to, "this is the new normal." And to be quite honest with you, a lot of times it is kind of said with, "Well, I'd rather go back to this, but this is the new normal." And the more I got to thinking about it, the more I don't want to settle for normal. I really don't. I don't want to fight it -- I just don't want to settle. But if I don't settle for it, it's going to take a whole lot of work. And the reason is, because the last few months have been hard. There's probably few series that I've ever preached that are more affected by the context of what we're living in. It was three months ago that we got news that we were entering into a pandemic. We knew what the word meant, we all took science in high school, and we have read about previous pandemics. But none of us have ever really lived through it. Church stopped gathering together. Things started to get restrictive. We stayed home. We started experiencing things that we'd never experienced, and one of the great challenges, I think for a lot of us, was not just that we had to stay home, not just that life came to a screeching halt. The fact is that we couldn't get what I believe was good and predictable information, and -- not to throw anyone under the bus -- part of the challenge was that the medical community was struggling hard to find out what were they dealing with? I gave them a lot of latitude in that. Probably what got me is when I began to see the politicization of this whole virus, and I began to see people use it in ways that I think were honestly very harmful -- and still are. It really disgusts me when I realize that the virus is real, and people have died, and -- whole economic structures have been disrupted, food chains have been broken. Sometimes certain individuals are estimating that we may see starvations which usually are in the vicinity of 40,000 a day go to as high as 80,000 a day. If you just tab that out, we've lost a little over 100,000 in the United States. Imagine losing 80,000 a day every day and it just keeps clicking. Why? Because we broke the chain. We were tired -- still are. People were frustrated. Lot of people in our

church got frustrated. Some believed that we should break the law and meet, that we were cowering. As one said, "You have allowed for the governor's knee to be on the back of your neck." Others have suggested that if we were to have any meetings until after the vaccine has been invented that we would be malicious and contributing to the death of people. So, the reality is -- there's been a whole lot of disagreement. And that's just in our church, let alone in the US.

We started to kind of look for hope. Maybe we're going to get together! And then, the tragic, absolute inexcusable death of George Floyd occurred. And an eruption occurred. I think out of the longstanding history of racism and pain and wound. And also, out of a tired country, frustrated and angry, confused. And the next thing you know, we have, again, a massive division. And that division comes not only in our country, but in our state and in our city, and, yes, into our church. I haven't seen a lot of humility. I haven't seen too many people lead with a level of kindness. I've seen on one side a whole lot of accusation, and branding all police officers as evil, and systems as evil, and -- on the other hand, a fairly severe defensiveness of, "I'm not privileged", or "I'm not racist," and, at the end of the day, few people are really talking. We predominantly are shouting. And the church is experiencing what the streets are -- division. I'm not a race expert by any stretch of the imagination. I'm not. It hurts, it really hurts. For me it hurts to watch people -- certainly do damage, but to be quite honest with you, buildings can be rebuilt. It's the lives probably that I'm most concerned about. And whether it be here in Salem, or LA, or Calcutta, or -- you name the place -- racism when it enters into those countries and those cities, it destroys. It divides. It hurts. And the temptation I find, even within myself, is to begin to look at it kind of statistically. What is the percentage of people that are abused by police? Or, what is the percentage of black men or women who die at the hands of other black men? And you start hearing, and you could -- you know, you've listened to them -- all of the statistics, and -- and then, it hit me. Actually this week. I've probably seen -- I don't know, I'm guessing -- well over 300 marriages for counseling in my 30-some years of pastoral work. And it just struck me this week that I have never seen a broken marriage healed by the use of statistics and data. Ever. I've never seen a marriage healed where they come in, and the wife says, "Do you realize that 77% of the time, you leave the bathroom dirtier than when you came in! And if you can just get down to 44%, you will be an average male!" I don't know if those stats are true. I have never seen a marriage healed through the use of statistics and data. I've seen walls built; I've seen people divided. I've seen people defensively justified. But I've never seen them healed. What heals brokenness? Every time, 300-plus couples, there's two things. It's the humility to see the brokenness of yourself and the sacrifice to learn to love an imperfect person.

I wonder if we might do that in our country. God gave me a verse. I was looking at some different texts and I came to this text in Romans 12, verse 21. And it said, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." What do I mean by that? What does it mean to be overcome by evil? What -- the oppression. What does it mean? It means to be discouraged to the point where you don't go on. It means to be so overwhelmed that you don't care. It means to be so influenced by the news that you become enraged and angry and it affects the way you live. Don't go there. But rather, overcome evil with good. And thus -- don't settle for normal. Do black lives matter? Oh, yes. Absolutely, my friend, black lives matter. And if you can't say that, I would simply ask you -- "Why not?" I would say to a husband, "Can you tell your wife that you love her?" "Of course." "Then do it." But I would add to that, my friends, can you tell a Chinese person, "You matter"? Because after our stint with Corona, and the language that was used nationally -- I've done a little poll. It's terribly unofficial. Every Chinese person I have found, I've gone up to -- every one that's been within a sphere that it wasn't awkward, and sometimes I even made it awkward -- I've gone up to them, and I've said, "Are you doing okay, and do you feel safe? Has it changed since the virus?" And I would have to say, statistically, I'm batting nearly a thousand that they have said it's worse. They're more

afraid. They feel more judged. Because somehow in our mind we can't distinguish the difference between maybe what happens in Beijing and what happens in a Chinese person's heart. Do black lives matter? Yes. Do Chinese matter? Yes. And I will never win the day if I have statistics for how good we are or how underprivileged I am. If I'm going to live an unnormal life, I will lead with humility and grace and kindness. And I will do everything I can to personally build a bridge to anyone whom, as I listen to, I recognize that if you're black in this country, it's often not a level playing field. And today, if you're Chinese, it's not always a level playing field -- as in 2002, if you were an Arab, it wasn't a level playing field. Do black lives matter? I hope you can say that. Along with Chinese matter. Arabs matter. So, how do I get there?

That's what this series is about. It's going to have three movements. The first movement is, What do I do with my emotions? Because we've had a lot of them. Emotions of rage and anger and frustration and just indifference. We'll talk about those. The next movement is, What convictions must I have so that I will not lose my mind? What are the things that I must know and believe about God in this tumultuous season so that I can rest and be at peace with what seems at times even like injustice? Lastly -- and we'll spend a number of weeks on this one -- What assignments must I accept because I am a follower of Christ?

So tonight, we start with, What must I do with my emotions? And I want to teach you how to complain really well. You say, "Well, I already know how!" No, you know how to complain, but do you know how to complain well? Complaint is not something that comes foreign to people. People complain a lot. They do! It's not, by the way, just an American thing, it's a world thing! People complain all the time! It's a biblical thing. Look at all the times that people complain! I want to take you, though, to a text that teaches you how to complain biblically, because if you learn how to complain biblically it leaves you redemptively affected in a positive way. If you don't learn how to complain biblically, it can lead you to apostasy. There's a new writer, I think a songwriter, who just recently defected. It's been kind of a common thing. People wonder, Well, how could a person who has written songs for Jesus, how can a pastor preach about Christ, and then deny God? To be quite honest with you, I think it's easy to understand -- if you don't process well the disappointment that you have in life, you will almost inevitably lead to the suicide of your belief. Why? It's because I either believe in the goodness of God or I sustain the disappointment of life. How do I reconcile those two? Through complaint.

How do I complain well? That's what Asaph teaches us in Psalm 74. He comes to God and he says, "Why have you rejected us forever?" Well, what is the setting? The setting is so critical. The people of God -- well, first of all, they were routed by the Babylonians, and their temple was destroyed. Now, I know a lot of us have complained that we haven't been able to meet as a church, and we're frustrated that we haven't been able to be together for three months! And some have argued -- We need to disobey the government! Well, Asaph was talking about a nation who not only was forbidden to worship, but their temple was destroyed! Everything was wiped out, and they were exiled, they were taken away by the Babylonians. And they were tired of it. And Asaph comes, and he goes, "Hey, God -- let me remind you -- were we not to be a people of God that worshipped you, and were we not to be a people of God that came into your presence, and were we not to be a people who came into this temple? Wasn't it David who said, 'And I rejoiced when they said, Let us come into the house of the Lord'? You got a problem with that, God?" That's the setting. It wasn't just one or two people -- this was a whole nation that was crying out to God. It was kind of, you know, something where they were, again, the whole tribe, it wasn't just one person that was mad.

But the question is this -- how do we bring our complaints to God and yet sustain trust in the midst of such a conversation? How do we not lead ourselves to the suicide of our own beliefs because of the disappointments of what life brings? Number one, God teaches us -- you've got to learn how to complain honestly. They did. Learn how to complain honestly. If you want a bracket, that's verses 1 through 11. "Why have you rejected us? Why does your anger smolder against us? Remember your people you purchased of old, the tribe of your inheritance." Now I say God honors this -- why? Because God selected this and put it in the Bible. If you believe in the inerrancy of scripture, as I do, that all scripture is inspired by God, what you have here is God's selection. It was a psalm, but God's, if you will, use of it is His acceptance of it. Thank you, Asaph. I appreciate your honesty. I appreciate your honesty. I really do. I appreciate the fact that you have the willingness to come to me and share with me your honest heart. Life doesn't match up. I know you don't get it. I know it's hard to hold things together, and as David said, at times there's things too lofty for me to hold onto. And it's so much better to let God have it than to stuff that thing down. And you start creating distance between you and God. I think sometimes we're way too committed to a false piety where we pretend that everything is okay, we pretend that we're good with God. We say, Well, whatever God wills. Meanwhile, we're seething inside. Meanwhile, we're frustrated with what's happening. Meanwhile, we don't know how to process the things that are occurring. That piety is not God-honoring. It's actually false. And God says, "I would rather you be honest." The up side of this is that God tells me He's emotionally stable and He's okay with me coming to him and admitting, God, this world doesn't make sense to me. And He's okay, because He's already told me, in Isaiah 55:8, that His thoughts are not my thoughts, and His ways are not my ways, and He's fine with me processing the fact that my thoughts don't align with His in this world that doesn't make a lot of sense sometimes.

You have to learn to complain honestly. But also, learn to complain specifically. Look at verse three. "Turn your steps toward these everlasting ruins." In other words, Lord, look -- this is not rude to God. I don't think for a moment. Again, I think if it was rude, God would've smacked him. And God has ways to do that. Remember when Job was getting a little out of hand, and Job was kind of having it out with God and said, "I demand an appointment with you," and God says to Job, "Okay, no problem. But before you do, I've got a few questions for you. Job, when I was putting this whole thing together, and putting the stars in place, were you there?" I mean, it was kind of a poetic way to say "Job, can I put you in your place?" Well, God doesn't do that to Asaph. Asaph says to God, he says what? Two things -- number one, "Turn your eyes towards these ruins. Take a look at them." But he doesn't stop there. He goes on to describe to these men, these Babylonians who are like men wielding axes. But he also goes with the very intent -- "They smashed all the carved paneling. God, they burned your sanctuary." Do you think somehow God was unaware of that one? Like, maybe God was a little too interested in India that day? And missed this? No. "They defiled your dwelling place." But, here's -- look at verse eight. Not only does he say, "God, I want you to look at what they've done -- I want you to look at their intention. They said in their hearts, 'We will crush them completely.'"

What does it mean to complain well? Not only is it to be honest with what you're feeling, but it's to be specific in what you're seeing. I hate racism. I really do. The idea that I would be judged specifically for the color of my skin frustrates the daylights out of me. And I can only imagine how hurtful it would be to another person. I also significantly dislike branding broad scopes of people like all police officers as purveyors of a system of evil. God, take a look at this injustice. I get tired of politicians. And to think at one point in my life I wanted to be in politics. For those of you who are in politics, God bless you. But there are times in the last three months where I've said, "God, if I were God, she would not be alive. I'm glad you're God because I make bad judgments." But there's

been times I've said, "That's evil. It's cruel. Lord, they -- that's a lie." And the psalmist is teaching me -- look around your world, become aware. Not that we are the judges. Not that we are the final de facto of all of life. But he's saying, "Look around, and draw God's attention, and in that moment, you have engaged the reality of your God -- God, I need to talk to you about this. This is driving me crazy! I need to talk to you because if I don't, it will become a poison that will destroy me." Learn to complain to God honestly, specifically. But also, my friends, humbly. Complain humbly. What do I mean by that? I was listening to a message by Tim Keller. It's given in 2017, you can find it on YouTube. Just "Corporate Sin, Tim Keller." It's worth your 26 minutes. And in this he was talking about one of the great needs, and I think it's so true. He said, "Unless we approach this issue with humility, we'll never have influence." Where do I see humility in these individuals' lives? They come to God. They recognize that -- "God, at the end of the day, the only justice we will ever get, the only One who can ultimately handle this whole situation is You. You're the only One who can really deal with these Babylonians. You're the only One who can deal with this shattered hope. You're the only one. I thrust myself upon You." That is humility. Cast your anxiety upon Him. Peter says, "Humble yourself before the mighty hand of God and He will lift you up." What does it mean to humble yourself? Well, I don't necessarily think it means just that you bow your knee. It may mean that you bow your heart. And they do. "God -- what I see is hurting me. Your temple's destroyed. And I'm never going to get to praise God with my friends again." And they humbly come to the Father.

Learn how to complain to God. But my friends, here is what may be the most important transition in this text. And if you don't make this, you inevitably will lead to apostasy, the suicide of your own belief. If you learn to complain but you don't learn to trust, you'll inevitably lead to an enraged heart, and something has to give. And as we are seeing with a number of well-known people, they commit suicide of their own belief. But you don't have to. Commit yourself to trust.

How do you do that? Number one, you acknowledge that your trust is not predicated upon current good circumstances. Theirs is not! It's not good. It's not good at all, but what does he do? He says, "But you, oh God" -- verse 12, 12 through 17, that's the bracket you want to give yourself there -- "But you, oh God, you're my King from of old, you bring salvation upon the earth. It was you who split open the sea by the power." Where's he going back to? This is back to the Exodus, back to the Red Sea. He takes them back. And this is one of the most important things you'll ever learn to do. Trust is built upon the previous work, the faithfulness of God. And it is one of the most essential things that you will need in the essence or in the midst of the complaint and the frustration that you face in the present. Your trust is not predicated upon current good circumstances. Nothing was good. But he took a history lesson. He went back and he looked at the Exodus. But he doesn't even stop with the Exodus, looks where he goes back, and he goes, "It was You who opened up the springs and the streams. You dried up the ever-flowing rivers. The day is yours! You established the sun and the moon!" Where's he at now? Give me a verse! Oh, you know where we're at -- Genesis one! He went back to creation. "It was You who set the boundaries of the earth, You made both summer and winter." Except for in Oregon! You made winter! Hallelujah. Yeah. Who do I build my trust upon? I build my trust not upon the good or bad circumstances of the present, but on the past good work of God.

As we've been talking about reentry, kind of relaunching, understandably I've read a whole bunch of different articles -- books aren't out yet -- articles. And probably the vast majority of them are saying this: It's not gonna be like it was. Yup, got that one. Thirty percent of people aren't coming back. So you can only expect somewhere in the vicinity of 70 percent of people. And they list all of these things you can expect. And so, you start reading this and reading this, and -- another one is on the financial condition of the church. And another one is on the devaluation of property. And

another one is on ... and so, we've been reading these and reading these and reading these. And the next thing you know, by the time you read through all of these, you are so depressed that you're going to apply for a job at Amazon. It gets discouraging when you read all these things. What's the future of the church? God, what are you going to do with your church? What's going to happen? When we come back, will we be able to worship, or will we have the 12-foot rule if you have the mask, and the 21-foot rule if you don't have a mask? And there will be all of these things. And will it be so arduous and so painful that no one will want to come back? And will it be even 70 percent that will come back? Maybe only 50. And -- the next thing you know, you begin to think, "Oh, God." And then you go back and you look at history. And you look at the church, when it -- through the plagues, in the first 300 years, and the church marched on, and on, and on. And then you went back and you saw the church when it went through the first major split. And the church was wounded, and it was severely hurt. But then it began to grow, and it began to grow. And then you go back and look at our country -- at certain plagues that have occurred, and through the depression and through the world wars, and you realize that at each moment -- oh yes, the church was significantly affected. But there's a promise that goes to the church. God's name is on the promise. The church won't fail. God says, "I'll see to it." And as much as we may look at this and become frustrated with our governor or frustrated with some other organization -- the way you process your complaint well is that you commit yourself to trust God -- not us, not me, not the body -- God. Because we don't trust God predicated upon our current difficult circumstance -- oh, no. Our trust is based upon the cross and its message of love and victory. We look back to a day when Satan thought he had won, when he threw the biggest party in Hell that you can imagine. When Satan was running around Hell, slapping a high-five to every demon that he could get his hands on. When Satan had a moment in his life where he felt like he won! And the only real thing that was happening was, Jesus was taking a trip up through the heavenly realms, passing the great throne in Heaven, bowing before His Father. Commissioned by the Holy Spirit. Sent back to Hell to preach a message. And Satan's party soon died. That is what you trust. That's the reason why the racial conflict will one day subside. That's the reason why one day the body of Christ will gather again. It's not because we will get through the virus. It's because Christ has won the victory. It was You who set all the boundaries of the earth. It was You who brought salvation upon the earth. It was You. Commit yourself to trust God. That's how you handle your frustration. And if you do, then you can trust God with the change.

I want you to notice something as we move to the last section. This writer has changed, he has. It doesn't really resolve completely, but something subtle, but oh, it's so important to notice. "Remember how the enemy has mocked You, oh Lord? How foolish people have reviled your name?" Where's his focus? Do you notice this subtle change? "Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts, and do not forget the lives of your afflicted people. Have regard for your covenant. Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace. Rise up, oh God, and defend" -- whose cause? "Yours!" Where's the change of focus? If I might be so bold -- when you think about your anger at not being able to gather together, is your deepest passion for you to come back to the church for your benefit, or for the glory of Christ? Let me be very personal. When it comes to the issue of racism, is your deepest passion for you to be recognized, or is it for God's glory to be seen in the unification of the people? You see, the difference between a biblical complaint and a not-biblical complaint -- an unbiblical complaint demands that my needs be met. A biblical complaint pleads that God's glory be seen. It's not that they don't recognize -- "God, your temple's destroyed, and we're living in exile, and Father" -- but that's not where he finishes. He finishes with this -- "Father, defend Your cause. Don't ignore the clamor of your adversaries, the uproar of your enemies which rise continually." You see, a biblical complaint will lead you where? The trusting one will be led to the glory of God. God, remember your covenant.

Father, these different races, they're your people. For your glory, unify them. Father, this is your church. For your glory, strengthen it. Would I like to be back together? Oh, yes! Absolutely! But my friends, if I let my complaint be purely and solely for me, I will eventually apostate my belief. I will commit suicide of my belief. Why? Because they remained as exiles until Jesus came back. And then, by the way, if you know Peter's words, he told them, "We are exiles." They never came home. But that's not the issue. Because God's glory became their passion. And that's how you complain well.

Copyright by First Baptist Church, Salem OR (June 6, 2020). Please do not copy without written permission of the copyright holder.