

Brought Very Low

Jesus in the Psalms

Psalm 79

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I. Preparing for Hard Providences

Psalm 79 - A Psalm of Asaph.

¹O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled; They have laid Jerusalem in heaps. ²The dead bodies of Your servants— They have given *as* food for the birds of the heavens, The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth. ³Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem, And *there was* no one to bury *them*. ⁴We have become a reproach to our neighbors, A scorn and derision to those who are around us.

⁵How long, LORD? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire? ⁶Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You, And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name. ⁷For they have devoured Jacob, And laid waste his dwelling place. ⁸Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us, For we have been brought very low. ⁹Help us, O God of our salvation, For the glory of Your name; And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, For Your name's sake! ¹⁰Why should the nations say, "Where *is* their God?" Let there be known among the nations in our sight The avenging of the blood of Your servants *which has been* shed. ¹¹Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; According to the greatness of Your power Preserve those who are appointed to die; ¹²And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

¹³So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, Will give You thanks forever; We will show forth Your praise to all generations.

II. Brought Very Low

A. Lamenting the Calamity (1-4)

Like Psalm 74, this psalm laments not so much *personal* suffering but _____ suffering. It is likely that this son of Asaph was a survivor of the Babylonian invasion and conquest of Judah in 586 BC. He lays before God the devastation that is all around him.

B. Praying for Salvation and Forgiveness (5-12)

Having laid the situation before the Lord, Asaph proceeds to pray for forgiveness, salvation, and vindication. While he knows that this calamity has come upon Israel because of Israel's _____ and idolatry, he pleads for its end. He prays that God would act against His enemies, forgive Israel's iniquities, and deliver them from suffering *for His own* _____ sake!

C. Promising Thanksgiving and Praise (13)

The psalm closes with a promise of thanksgiving and praise. As God's people, if God acts to vindicate His Name by judging His enemies and forgiving and delivering us, then we ought to give Him eternal *thanks* and *praise*.

III. Dealing with Calamity

Thomas Aquinas wrote that despair "is due to a man's failure to hope that he will share in the goodness of God." For Aquinas, despair was more dangerous than even unbelief or hatred of God because "by hope we are called back from evils and induced to strive for what is good, and if hope is lost, men fall headlong into vices, and are taken away from good works." For Aquinas, "nothing is more execrable [appalling] than despair. For he who despairs loses his constancy in the daily labors of this life, and what is worse, loses his constancy in the endeavor of faith." As the sixth-century theologian Isidore of Seville put it, "to commit a crime is death to the soul; but to despair is to descend into hell." (John Stonestreet, <https://breakpoint.org/breakpoint-the-so-called-deaths-of-despair/>)

A. Lay the calamity before the Lord (cf. Mt 6:25-34)

Asaph teaches us to lay our problems before the Lord because they are real problems. God's revealed will, His preceptive will, is for joy, peace, harmony, mutual cooperation, trust, and love in human relationships and societies. When calamity strikes, we need not despair but lay it before God knowing that it displeases Him and that He cares for us:

²⁵"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁸"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Mt 6:25-34)

B. Petition God to Act for His Name's Sake (Num 14:13ff; 2 Chr 36:15-17)

Asaph teaches us to petition God to act for His Name's sake. Notice that here is where Asaph teaches us how firmly grounded our _____ is. Why had Israel suffered this calamity?

¹⁵And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. ¹⁶But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy. ¹⁷Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans [Babylonians], who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; [God] gave them all into his hand. (2 Chr 36:15-17)

But though Israel is suffering because of her sin, Asaph still has _____ because He knows that God is zealous for His Name and so He appeals to God to show mercy *for His Name's sake*. God is determined to glorify His Name in all the earth – and so Asaph appeals to this determination. Even when the calamity or consequences we are suffering have come as a result of our own sin, *we are not without hope*.

C. Purpose to Praise God as He Acts (cf. Dt 28:47-48; Mt 6:33)

Asaph teaches us to purpose to praise God when He acts on our behalf. Our prayers and purposes when suffering calamity reveal our heart. So notice that Asaph doesn't just want the blessings of forgiveness, deliverance, and vindication. He wants them *for the sake of God's _____*. If we are suffering some calamity that is a consequence of personal or corporate sin against God, if we just want the reversal of the calamity, then we have not learned the lesson of the calamity – which is to teach us that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; that we are to seek first God and His righteousness. We dare not pray for relief for relief's sake – that is to make relief a greater end than God.

⁴⁷"Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, ⁴⁸therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. (Dt 28:47-48)

IV. Conclusion