

Psalm 79 • Witnessing the devastation caused by sin

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Psalm 79 if we could. And this is an interesting and I think fairly appropriate Psalm frankly, for today. Here in the United States, we are observing the anniversary of the events that we refer to as 9/11 and the devastating attacks that occurred in New York City. And what's interesting about that is, and as devastating as that was, Psalm 79 is actually written by someone who witnessed similar devastation.

Psalm 79 is listed as a Psalm of Asaph, but as we get into this Psalm and we begin to read what's going on in Israel, and specifically in Jerusalem at this time, we're going to find that he speaks of the devastation of Jerusalem and the devastation of the temple.

Well, the Asaph that we know was a contemporary of king David and king Solomon and during that time, there was no devastation of the city. There was no destruction of the temple. That would not take place for hundreds of years. And it wasn't until the Babylonian army came in, literally hundreds of years later and accomplished that devastation, that those things happened and were written about.

So we're left with three possibilities, I guess. There may be more. But either this Psalm, although it's attributed to Asaph, the Asaph of David's day, there's a chance that it was written by someone much later who actually witnessed the events that surrounded the fall of Jerusalem and the temple.

Or it's possible that there was another man named Asaph who wrote these things down. Not that was necessarily an uncommon name. And the name could very well have been perpetuated among the temple musicians.

Or there's a possibility that this is the Asaph of David and Solomon's day and he was writing prophetically. That's a possibility. It doesn't really matter.

But what we are going to see in this Psalm is that the writer describes devastation. And the reason that is significant, not just because today we're observing 9/11, but it's significant because of the great propensity that we have

as human beings to see something devastating and to have it cause us to stumble in our faith. It happens all the time.

So this Psalm begins in verse one by saying,

"¹ O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; (and that inheritance speaks of Israel) they have defiled your holy temple; (and then look) they have laid Jerusalem in ruins." (ESV)

Again, the Asaph of David in Solomon's day never would have seen those things. He wouldn't have lived long enough to do that in his lifetime. And then he goes on to describe in verses 2 and 3, things that he also would have never seen.

Verse 2,

"They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the heavens for food, the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth.

³ They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them."

And by the way, that is considered to be one of the biggest tragedies frankly, of life and death for a Jew. And that is to be denied burial.

You can see what's going on here. He speaks of this invasion into the Holy City, laying Jerusalem to ruins, killing people left and right, leaving them out and denying them burial and so forth.

Verse 4 goes on. He says,

"We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us."

And then he asked the question that is very often asked in situations like that.

"⁵ How long, O LORD? (This is a question that we've seen asked several times in the Psalms. He says,) Will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire?"

And I want you to notice that hardship often asks, or I should say, it causes us to ask questions. But I want you to also take note of the fact that these questions that arise from the psalmist don't necessarily cause him to question God in a way of losing his faith. He's questioning God in the sense of saying, how long is this going to happen?

And I think we probably have all experienced this, but it can be very difficult to feel like you've been deserted by God, can't it. When you feel like the Lord has just left you alone to deal with whatever issues you're dealing with in the hardship in which you're dealing with them. It is just, it is very easy, very easy to begin to lose faith.

But I'm noting here that as he's asking questions, it's not in that sense of losing faith, it's simply saying, Lord, how long is this going to last?

And then notice what he goes on to say in verse 6. He says,

"Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name!"

7 For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation."

By the way, that was a, that's a prayer that was answered in the case of those nations that did come against Israel and decimated it. God did finally judge them as well.

And look at his prayer in verse 8,

"Do not remember against us our former iniquities, let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low."

9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!"

Boy, there's a lot here. And again, I want to call your attention to the fact that these words are spoken by someone who has witnessed devastation. And the difficulty of that devastation. He begins to call upon the Lord to bring forth His compassion and His deliverance. And this is how we know that the psalmist hasn't lost faith.

It's because when we begin to lose faith, we begin to question whether God has any compassion. We begin to question whether God hears us at all. In fact,

when we lose faith, we stop praying altogether. But in the midst of the difficulty and in the midst of the pain of what he's witnessed all around him, he continues to call upon the Lord. He continues to believe that God is a God of compassion, even though he himself has not been feeling that compassion.

And we've talked about this a lot of times throughout the course of our study here in the book of Psalms. But we've talked many times about this idea of my feelings dictating my beliefs.

When you are going through a challenging time in your life, or when you're watching someone else go through a very challenging time, it obviously is going to elicit in you and I, great feelings of sadness, and empathy, and sorrow, and hurt. And all the things that go along with that.

And the question that really needs to be addressed in all of us is, how is that going to affect your understanding of who God is. In other words, are you going to let go of the belief that He is a God of compassion? Are you going to hang on to that based on your feelings? And that's really the important question.

We all go through emotional ups and downs. All the time you guys. I've gone through all kinds of things in my life. I know you have too, where I just, I wasn't very happy about the way things were going. And I look at the devastation of maybe my own life, or the life of somebody near me because of sin. And that's what the psalmist is seeing here. Make no mistake about it. It's devastation because of sin.

And he's looking upon this and his heart is filled with sorrow. And yet he calls upon God as, the God of compassion. He calls upon God as, the God of deliverance. Do you understand?

This is the point where you and I basically say, well, God has no compassion. God refuses to deliver. Look at what's going on. And we point to what's happening. And we point to the way we feel. And because of that, we essentially begin to question, I don't think God even loves anybody anymore. He certainly doesn't love me.

And what has happened in a situation like that? My feelings have dictated my doctrine. My feelings have literally rewrite, rewrote the Bible for me in terms of what it says about the person and the character of God.

And I want you to take note of the fact here in verses 8 and 9, that not only does he begin to speak to the Lord about bringing compassion. Not only does he

Speak to him about his deliverance. But he cares about God's reputation in the midst of this. And begins to speak about that reputation.

Look at the end of verse 9 when he says, *"deliver us, atone for our sins."* Why? So that I'll feel better. No. Actually, he says, *"for your name's sake!"*

This is one of those times where the psalmist keys into something that's very important for you and I to see in the Scripture. And that is how we as believers are appearing to others based on what's happening in our lives, based on what the Lord is doing in our lives. And that's why he begins to ask this question in verse 10. Look there in your Bible.

"Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'"

And you know what? I think this is a bold prayer. I really do. I think this is a bold prayer. Why should the nations go around mocking you, Lord? And why should they say, where is their God now?

You and I might say that differently. If we're going through some difficulty in our own lives and things look like they're falling apart all around us. And we could go to the Lord and say, hey, why should my unsaved family members begin to question Your love and compassion? I call upon You for your name's sake!

Why should my unsaved acquaintances look at the situation of my life and begin to question who You are because of what's happening. Pour out Your grace. Pour out your mercy. Pour out Your compassion. Right? For Your name's sake! For Your name's sake!

I'll never forget how it impacted me when I was reading, how, when God came to Moses at one point. In fact, he was up on the mountain and communing with the Lord. And the Lord began to reveal to him that the people of Israel had prostituted themselves down below.

And God said, leave Me alone now so I can just, so My anger can, brood against these guys. And I'm going to... And He told Moses, I'm going to wipe them out! We'll start over with you, Moses. We'll just start over with you. We'll create a whole new...

And you remember what Moses began to do as he talked to the Lord? He said, Lord, why should the enemies of Your people begin to mock You, and ridicule

You. And say, He took them out into the wilderness just to kill them. And he began to speak to the Lord about His own reputation, the Lord's reputation.

It's a really... It's a crazy conversation when you stop and think about it but I think it pleased the Lord very much to hear it because Moses cared more about how people viewed his God, than I think he cared about how people viewed him. Who cares. But Lord, look at this, why should people look at me, my situation, and say, where's his God now? Pour out Your mercy.

He goes on in verse 10 to say,

"Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes!" In other words, let them see that you avenge your people.

He says in verse 11,

"Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power, (and he goes on to ask that they might be preserved) those (who are) doomed to die!"

Verse 12. Once again, he says,

"Return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors the taunts with which they have taunted you, O LORD!"

And then the final verse,

"¹³ But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise."

That is a crazy way to end this Psalm, when you think about the devastation that this individual has witnessed. And the hand of God's judgment that has come upon the nation to the point where there are dead... I mean, good grief, guys! Think about it.

If you and I woke up tomorrow and there were dead bodies laying all around the city because an enemy had attacked and devastated our town. And there were people like... And would you begin to, would you talk to the Lord like this? Would you begin to speak of the Lord about how, we are your people, the sheep of your pasture, and we will recount your praise, O Lord, as You restore us again by Your compassion.

You see, when you put it like that, this is really an amazing statement by the psalmist. Because he never loses sight of the fact that he is among those who are known and loved by the Lord. His circumstances do not allow that change to take place. And that is so important. He is not governed by circumstances. He is governed by truth. By the truth of God's Word. Not what's going on in his life. He continues to say, we are the sheep of Your pasture.

The Book of Hebrews in the New Testament, I absolutely love that letter. But the book of Hebrews was written to Hebrew Christians who were going through great persecutions because of their faith in Jesus Christ. And the writer of that book wrote to them to exhort them about that persecution and how not to...

He encouraged them not to let the circumstances concerning their persecution change their understanding of God and their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. Let me put a passage up on the screen for you from Hebrews 10. Check this out. The writer of Hebrews says,

Hebrews 10:23 (ESV)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Now that's a wonderful verse. And even without... Even if your life is going good, that's an okay verse to look at. And you can go, yes! And, amen.

But when your life is in the toilet, so to speak, and nothing is going good. Everything is going bad. You've lost your job. You've lost your ability to earn money. In which it was happening for many of these Hebrews. And they were being persecuted, many of them to death.

Then to hold fast without wavering, holding to Him who is faithful, is a big deal. It suddenly becomes a very big deal. And, these are important reminders. "*Let us hold fast.*"