



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 79-83

Monday 20th July - Psalm 79

O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple,
they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.
2 They have left the dead bodies of your servants
as food for the birds of the sky,
the flesh of your own people for the animals of the wild.
3 They have poured out blood like water
all around Jerusalem,
and there is no one to bury the dead.
4 We are objects of contempt to our neighbours,
of scorn and derision to those around us.
5 How long, Lord? Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy burn like fire?
6 Pour out your wrath on the nations
that do not acknowledge you,
on the kingdoms
that do not call on your name;
7 for they have devoured Jacob
and devastated his homeland.
8 Do not hold against us the sins of past generations;

may your mercy come quickly to meet us,
for we are in desperate need.
9 Help us, God our Saviour,
for the glory of your name;
deliver us and forgive our sins
for your name's sake.
10 Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
Before our eyes, make known among the nations
that you avenge the out poured blood of your s
11 May the groans of the prisoners come before you
with your strong arm preserve those condemned
12 Pay back into the laps of our neighbours seven
the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord.
13 Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture
will praise you forever;
from generation to generation
we will proclaim your praise.

Some people feel very uncomfortable about God's sovereignty over history. We struggle to reconcile His sovereignty and his goodness. But if God is not sovereignly working out all things according to His good purposes (Ephesians 1:11) then what point is there in praying?

This is a dark Psalm. Written after the fall of Jerusalem, it paints a truly awful and tragic picture. The temple has been defiled and Jerusalem has been destroyed (v. 1). There are so many dead bodies that the birds are feasting and there aren't enough living people around to bury the dead (v. 2-3). Added to this is the mockery of the nations around them (v. 4).

Yet this Psalm gives us a beautiful picture of repentance and calling out to Yahweh despite how awful things are. The Psalmist begs God to show mercy and save them (v. 8). He asks for forgiveness and deliverance (v. 9). He asks God to work in such a way that His glory and name will be vindicated in a world that believed that military victories were the outworking of their god's victory over another nation's god. We see these same concerns in books like Jeremiah and Habakkuk. God uses Babylon to execute judgment against Israel, but He will not leave them unpunished. The prayer for justice in this Psalm will be (and was!) answered.

Living this side of the cross is so amazing, because we are reminded that Jesus was exiled for us. He, the greater temple, was destroyed. God's anger against our sin was poured out on Him. And as the church experiences the trials of this world, we know that God will bring justice eventually. In the meantime, He calls us to be people of repentance and faith, praying that the world would join with us.

Father, we praise you as sovereign king. You are in control and you are good. Help us to trust that you are working out your good purposes in all things. Help us to repent and trust you and praise you at all times.

James

Tuesday 21st July - Psalm 80

Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.

You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth

2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.

Awaken your might;
come and save us.

3 Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

4 How long, Lord God Almighty,
will your anger smoulder
against the prayers of your people?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

6 You have made us an object of derision[b] to our neighbours,
and our enemies mock us.

7 Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

8 You transplanted a vine from Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.

9 You cleared the ground for it,
and it took root and filled the land.

10 The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches.

11 Its branches reached as far as the Sea,
its shoots as far as the River.

12 Why have you broken down its walls
so that all who pass by pick its grapes?

13 Boars from the forest ravage it,
and insects from the fields feed on it.

14 Return to us, God Almighty!
Look down from heaven and see!

Watch over this vine,
15 the root your right hand has planted,
the son you have raised up for yourself.

16 Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire;
at your rebuke your people perish.

17 Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

18 Then we will not turn away from you;
revive us, and we will call on your name.

19 Restore us, Lord God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

This psalm is a cry for God's saving help written in the face of defeat. This is a reminder of centuries of pain and struggle and the hope in what God will do. God's people are described like a vine (v8-9), which is created by God not human cleverness. Three times the psalm calls out for renewal and restoration (v3,7,19). This is showing us, that what we really need, is not just to know the right things but experience God's presence and be changed by his life in us. (v3,7)

What's the bravest thing you've ever said? Asked the boy. "Help," said the horse. (From the book, "The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse").

It's difficult to ask for help and admit our brokenness in our individualistic world. It's hard to open ourselves up to the possibility of ridicule, rejection, and even to accept help when it is freely and gladly given. This is humbling and our pride takes a knock, but it is a beautiful thing. A huge part of growing in maturity as a person and a follower of Christ is being willing to say, "Help".

Heavenly Father, in every age, and especially today, people are dying and crying for help. Every week we hear of lives lost to sickness and hatred. In your mercy Lord, turn your face toward us, and help those hurting to know your presence. We thank you that Jesus – the true vine, is the one who gives us full access to your presence. Our hope is in you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Martin

Wednesday 22nd July - Psalm 81

Sing for joy to God our strength;
shout aloud to the God of Jacob!
2 Begin the music, strike the timbrel,
play the melodious harp and lyre.
3 Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon,
and when the moon is full, on the day of our festival;
4 this is a decree for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
5 When God went out against Egypt,
he established it as a statute for Joseph.
I heard an unknown voice say:
6 "I removed the burden from their shoulders;
their hands were set free from the basket.
7 In your distress you called and I rescued you,
I answered you out of a thundercloud;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.
8 Hear me, my people, and I will warn you—
if you would only listen to me, Israel!

9 You shall have no foreign god among you;
you shall not worship any god other than me.
10 I am the Lord your God,
who brought you up out of Egypt.
Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.
11 "But my people would not listen to me;
Israel would not submit to me.
12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
to follow their own devices.
13 "If my people would only listen to me,
if Israel would only follow my ways,
14 how quickly I would subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes!
15 Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him
and their punishment would last forever.
16 But you would be fed with the finest of wheat;
with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

One commentary describes this Psalm as God's lament. His cry over His people. The introduction to this psalm seems fairly standard affair. The call to worship is there because of the great redeeming strength of God. Yahweh, the covenant-making God, has redeemed His people with victory over the Egyptians and their gods. It the high point to show how far God's people have fallen.

But the psalm is interrupted at the end of verse 5 with an unknown voice. Who is this voice, It is clear that the person is God Himself. But the voice is not seen through an earthquake, thunder and lightning, nor does it bring the resultant fear of God. God's voice is unmistakable one of grief and pain. It seems that it is the cry of both a prosecutor and like that of an abandoned husband.

Later in the New Testament, we get to hear this voice on the mountain and in the plains of Judea and along the dusty streets of Galilean towns and in Jerusalem.

What is the problem with idols? It reveals that God's people seek to be satisfied with something or someone other than the one who saved them. I have often wondered about why idols, they are just bits of wood and rock. I think that it is because they in some ways work. Either on the demonic level or the external fixating on something else to solve a problem.

Consider these words of warning against idolatry (11 – 12). See how it prevents the people of God receiving the bounty from God's hands. How can we separate ourselves from our idol-making hearts? What are the things that need to fall for Jesus to fully use and bless our lives?

The cry of lament is echoed as Jesus walks amidst His church in Revelation 2 – 3. Perhaps a walk through these chapters might help us repent of the idols in our heart.

Thursday 23rd July - Psalm 82

God presides in the great assembly;
he renders judgment among the "gods":
2 "How long will you defend the unjust
and show partiality to the wicked?
3 Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.
4 Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
5 "The 'gods' know nothing, they understand nothing.
They walk about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
6 "I said, 'You are "gods";
you are all sons of the Most High.'
7 But you will die like mere mortals;
you will fall like every other ruler."
8 Rise up, O God, judge the earth,
for all the nations are your inheritance.

This is only a short psalm.

Psalm 82 is written as a sharp rebuke to those who exercise judicial authority and who think of themselves as above reproach v.1.

Instead of standing up for the rights of the poor and rescuing the needy from wealthy overlords, judges and magistrates are guilty of giving preferential treatment to those who exploit and undermine the people who are on the lowest rung of society v.2-4.

Because those who are called to exercise justice are blind to justice, there is no stability in society, and "*all the foundations of the earth are shaken*" v.5.

These judges may be of high rank. They may even think of themselves as 'gods'. But their high rank will not save them on the day of God's righteous judgment. They will share the fate of all mortals v.6-7.

The psalm ends with an invitation for God to arise and judge the earth. v.8.

Father God, we thank you for your sovereignty over all your creation, and for your authority over the whole of our lives. We pray for magistrates and judges, for law enforcement officers, and for all in the legal profession. May they exercise their authority in a way that honours you, empowers the poor, and edifies and protects each person in the community.

John

Friday 24th July - Psalm 83

O God, do not remain silent;
do not turn a deaf ear,
do not stand aloof, O God.
2 See how your enemies growl,
how your foes rear their heads.
3 With cunning they conspire against your people;
they plot against those you cherish.
4 "Come," they say, "let us destroy them as a nation,
so that Israel's name is remembered no more."
5 With one mind they plot together;
they form an alliance against you—
6 the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
of Moab and the Hagrites,
7 Byblos, Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia, with the people of Tyre.
8 Even Assyria has joined them
to reinforce Lot's descendants.
9 Do to them as you did to Midian,
as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon,

In this Psalm, David again calls on the Lord to rescue him and the people of God from the enemies around them. The claim David makes is that the conspiratorial enemies of God are seeking to "destroy them as a nation, so that Israel's name is remembered no more". The implication in David's claim is that the surrounding nations have forgotten who Israel's God is, the God who won them victory and the land in the first place.

David names the nations that have forgotten the God of Israel. Among them are Edom, Moab and the people of Tyre. David goes on to call on God to deliver judgement on these enemy nations just as God had done before. The nations who forget the power of Yahweh will ultimately be undone by the power of Yahweh.

Reading the Psalms, it is tempting to think 'goodies and badies'. Israel (and David) are always good and the enemy nations are always bad. God will always rescue Israel from the nations who have forgotten who God is.

The prophet Amos identifies that God's judgement is marching ever onward to destroy the nations who have forgotten who God is. Among them are Edom, Moab and the people of Tyre. It is sobering then, when in Amos chapter 2, Judah (southern tribes) and Israel (northern tribes) are among the nations condemned to face God's impartial judgment because they too have forgotten the Lord their God.

With all that is going on in our world, unless we are seeking God regularly in his word, it is easy to forget the God who saved us. Israel is a nation who forgets the power of Yahweh and who is ultimately be undone by the power of Yahweh.

In Amos 5:4, God cries to Israel 'seek me and live'. God is present in his word and we have all the resources we need to find him there. At this time, and at all times, seek him and live.

Father God, help us we pray to seek you always in your word. You are a good God and we need you now and always. Keep us focused on the God who saved us we pray. Amen.

