

“RESPONDING TO A WORLD IN LEAGUE WITH THE DEVIL”

I. Introduction

- A. The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther once pointed out that, “He who will have, for his master and king, Jesus Christ... will have the devil for his enemy.”
1. And having the devil for your enemy means having to endure opposition from the world.
 2. The devil is ruler over this present darkness in our fallen world.
 3. If you have the devil as your enemy, you also have the world as your enemy.
 4. As Jesus told his disciples, “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:19 ESV)
- B. Psalm 83 is a prayer that was prompted by the opposition that the Israelites faced from other nations.
1. It is one of the imprecatory psalms, in which God’s people pray for the Lord to intervene and unleash his judgment against his and their enemies.
 2. As we study this psalm today, we will consider how it provides three basic insights into how we should respond to the world’s opposition to the church.
 3. First, Psalm 83 teaches us to apprise God of the plot against his people.

4. Second, it shows us how to draw upon past deliverances for the encouragement of our faith.
5. And third, it instructs us to seek God's glory.

II. Apprising God of the Plot against His People (1-8)

- A. The psalm begins with a threefold plea to God: do not keep silence; do not hold your peace; do not be still.
 1. In the eyes of the psalmist, God seems to be inactive, and his silence stands in sharp contrast to the activity of his enemies.
 2. They are making an uproar.
 3. They have raised up their heads against the Lord.
 4. But God is not doing anything about it.
 5. This reminds us that God does not always provide immediate deliverance when his people are faced with adversity.
 6. He sometimes puts us in situations where our faith is put to the test.
 7. He did this with the people Israel immediately after he brought them out of Egypt.
 8. He led them to the shores of the Red Sea, where they soon found themselves trapped, with the waters on one side and Pharaoh's army on the other.
 9. When the Lord brings us through trials of this nature, he calls us to endure them with patient faith.
 10. At the same time, in giving us this psalm, he makes it clear that he permits us to ask him to make haste to deliver us.

- B. As the psalmist expresses his plea for deliverance, he explains to God why deliverance is necessary.
1. He tells God about the forces that are allied against his people.
 2. He tells God what those forces are plotting to do.
 3. Of course, God does not need the psalmist to apprise him of these things.
 4. God knows everything.
 5. Nevertheless, our heavenly Father wants us to make our concerns known to him.
- C. As the psalmist brings his petition before God, notice how he frames his concerns.
1. He says to God, "*your* enemies make an uproar."
 2. He tells God about "those who hate *you*."
 3. He complains to God that his enemies are threatening "*your* people" and "*your* treasured ones."
 4. He says to God, "against *you* they make a covenant."
 5. This makes it clear that in opposing God's covenant people, these nations are opposing God himself.
 6. This is an important thing for us to keep in mind whenever we see the church facing opposition from the world today.
 7. We need to remember that such opposition is ultimately directed toward God.
 8. And we need to point this out to God in our prayers, and ask him to take action.

- D. As the psalmist describes the activity of God's enemies, he says that they lay crafty plans against the people of God.
1. The word "crafty" comes from the same Hebrew root that is used to describe Satan in Genesis 3:1, where it says, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made." (Gen 3:1 ESV)
 2. This connection with Satan is not surprising when we consider the nature of the plot that is described in this psalm.
 3. The enemies of God are conspiring and entering into a covenant for the purpose of utterly destroying the people of Israel.
 4. They want to wipe them out.
 5. This is the effort in which Satan has been engaged ever since he successfully tempted Adam and Eve in the garden.
 6. It is what the Lord said would happen when he spoke these words to the serpent in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen 3:15 ESV)
 7. The offspring of the woman is the line of promise, the line through which Christ would eventually come into the world.
 8. The offspring of the serpent is the line of reprobation, the portion of the human race whom God passed over in his decree of election, thereby condemning them to the eternal destruction that their sins deserve.
 9. Ever since the Lord spoke those words to the serpent, the world, under the influence of Satan, has been trying to wipe out the line of promise, beginning with Cain's murder of Abel in Genesis 4.
 10. Psalm 83's description of the unholy alliance between various nations is yet another instance of Satan's perennial attempt to

destroy the church.

- E. It is not clear what the particular circumstances were that led to the writing of this psalm.
1. It is possible that the events described in 2 Chronicles 20 lay in the background.
 2. In that passage we are told of how Judah was threatened in the days of Jehoshaphat by an alliance between Edom, Moab, and Ammon.
 3. While those three nations are among those listed in Psalm 83, the list of enemies here is significantly larger than that.
 4. Whether or not the crisis described in 2 Chronicles 20 is what prompted the writing of Psalm 83, that crisis certainly was one historical example of the world's opposition to the church.
 5. It may be that commentator Derek Kidner is correct when he says that this psalm is summarizing the "perennial aggression of the world against God and His people." [Kidner, 300]
- F. The nations listed in verses 6 through 8 are said to act "with one accord."
1. This is especially significant when we consider that at least ten distinct groups of peoples are mentioned in these three verses.
 2. It is no small thing to get ten nations to act with one accord.
 3. This reminds us how opposition to God can produce unlikely alliances.
 4. We see an example of this in the Gospels, where the Jewish leaders team up with the Roman authorities due to their shared opposition to Christ.
 5. We see an example of the same thing in our day when social progressives align themselves with Islam in spite of the fact that

Islam is so oppressive to women.

6. Because opposition to God is the default setting of our fallen race, it can produce some strange alliances.
- G. It is also worth noting that many of the groups named in verses 6 through 8 had a biological connection to Israel.
1. The Edomites were the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau.
 2. The Ishmaelites were descended from the son who was born to Abraham through Hagar.
 3. And the Moabites and Ammonites were born to Abraham's nephew Lot through his incestuous unions with his wicked daughters.
 4. The fact that Israel was opposed by these peoples reminds us that some of the fiercest opposition that the church ever faces comes from those who either are, or were at one time, outwardly affiliated with the church.
 5. As John Calvin comments, "it is, as it were, the destiny of the church, not only to be assailed by external enemies, but to suffer far greater trouble at the hands of false brethren. At the present day, none are more furiously mad against us than counterfeit Christians."

III. Drawing Upon Past Deliverances (9-12)

- A. We turn now to the middle section of this psalm, which begins in verse 9.
1. Here, as the psalmist asks the Lord to defeat Israel's enemies, he draws upon past deliverances to stir up his own faith and the faith of his fellow Israelites.
 2. The particular examples cited come from the book of Judges.

3. The first is the defeat of Midian, whose army of over 100,000 was wiped out by Gideon's whittled-down force of 300.
 4. Next are the Canaanite king Jabin and the commander of his army, Sisera.
 5. Though Jabin's army had 900 iron chariots, the Lord routed them by the troops led by Deborah and Barak.
 6. As for Sisera, he was slain by the hand of a woman named Jael, who drove a tent peg through his temple while he was sleeping.
 7. Next to be mentioned in our psalm are Oreb and Zeeb, and Zebah and Zalmunna, all of whom were leaders of the Midianites who fell by the hand of Gideon and his army.
 8. These deliverances were brought about when God's people were vastly outnumbered.
 9. They encourage us to have confidence that no force that is ever aligned against us is too much for God to handle.
 10. If he delivered his people against overwhelming odds in days gone by, he will surely continue to do so in the present and on into the future.
- B. Notice what Israel's enemies are depicted as saying in verse 12.
1. They say, "Let us take possession for ourselves of the pastures of God."
 2. In the book of Judges, the Midianites were seeking to lay claim to Israel's land and put it to their own use.
 3. In the same way, the world is always trying to take control of the church and absorb it into itself.
 4. All too often, the world succeeds in this effort.

5. There are many so-called churches today whose basic message is utterly indistinguishable from the mainstream beliefs of the broader culture.
6. Of course, the Lord is able to preserve a people for himself, and he will most certainly do so.
7. As Jesus said, he will build his church, and nothing, not even the gates of Hades, will prevail against it.
8. But if we want to remain a part of Christ's true church, we need to make sure that we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds, lest we be conformed to the pattern of this world.

IV. Seeking God's Glory (13-18)

- A. This brings us to the last section of Psalm 83, which begins in verse 13.
 1. Here the psalmist asks the Lord to make those who set themselves against his people like chaff before the wind, and like a forest consumed by fire.
 2. Both of these images convey the idea of being overwhelmed by an unstoppable force.
 3. Chaff and dust are whirled about and blown wherever the wind sends them.
 4. And as we know from the reports of the wildfires that so often plague those who live out west, such fires can spread so quickly that the only thing to do is get out of the way.
 5. Yet as powerful as wind and fire can be, they pale in comparison with the power of God.
- B. The psalmist also prays that the Lord would put his enemies to shame.

1. The language of shame is unpopular in our culture, at least with respect to things that are genuinely shameful.
 2. We have reached the point where people who do things that really are shameful shame those who are not willing to affirm them for doing those things.
 3. This psalm reminds us that the most shameful thing of all is to live in defiance of the living God.
 4. Sooner or later, this will be made evident to everyone who has ever lived.
- C. Psalm 83 expresses two ways in which this shame can be experienced.
1. First, verse 16 says, "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O LORD."
 2. This is a prayer for God to bring his enemies to the point where they are convinced that he is the one true God.
 3. It is a prayer for God to work a godly grief in his enemies, a grief that will lead them to repentance and saving faith.
 4. This is something that we should desire for all people.
 5. We should pray for the Lord to fill the lost with shame so that they will seek God's name.
- D. The other way this shame can be experienced is expressed in verse 17, where it says, "Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in disgrace."
1. This is the shame that will be experienced by those who are condemned to an eternity in hell.
 2. Hell is a place of everlasting shame.

3. This is made clear in Daniel 12, where it says that on the last day some will be raised “to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (v. 2)
 4. Those who do not in this life repent of their opposition to God will spend eternity in a state of shame and disgrace.
- E. Our psalm concludes with the prayer that God’s enemies will be brought to know that the Lord alone, identified here by his covenant name Yahweh, is “the Most High over all the earth.”
1. People in the ancient world believed in the existence of many different gods.
 2. Israel’s enemies did not deny that Yahweh exists.
 3. They saw him as one among many gods.
 4. But the Bible makes an exclusive claim about Yahweh.
 5. It declares that he is the one and only true God, and that he is exalted over all peoples and over all creation.
 6. The earth is but his footstool.
 7. As we are told in Psalm 2, though the nations continue to rage against the Lord and against his Christ, the one enthroned in the heavens laughs, saying, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

V. Conclusion

- A. As the world continues its efforts against the church, the Lord may at times appear to be silent.
- B. He will not remain silent forever.

- C. In due time, the nations will be made Christ's heritage, and the ends of the earth his possession.
- D. This is the blessed hope for which we are waiting, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who delivers us from the wrath to come.
- E. This is why our message to the people of this world needs to be the same as the message that was entrusted to the apostle Paul: "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."