

Jerusalem Is Gone

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Bible Verse: Psalm 79
Preached on: Tuesday, September 25, 2018

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One of the things that we believe and that we are confident in is the sufficiency of Scripture and the sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ for every aspect of life, and we rest in that and we hope in that, and even as we contemplate, "Well, what if the worst thing happens, would Christ in His word be sufficient for me even then?" And Martyn Lloyd-Jones has made the point in the past where sometimes people are told when they are troubled by worry, people will give them counsel and say, "Well, it might not even happen so why worry about it?" And people are supposed to find comfort in that but the good doctor makes the excellent point that that doesn't really satisfy the trembling heart because the trembling heart can say, "Yes, but it might happen and then what happens to me then?" Giving people a vague promise that it might not happen is not something that actually satisfies and gives rest to the human heart. Well, in Psalm 79 what we come across is a time in the life of the nation of Israel where the absolute worst had happened. Nothing worse could have happened to them from their perspective than what had just happened in Psalm 79 and we find that even in the midst that life could have brought to them, that they had a perspective that was strong enough to lead them forward even though everything around them had been rendered desolate, and when we see this today and we look back at their situation, we see how they processed the worst thing that could happen, we realize that we are living in the Christian life from a position of strength that, yes, we know in advance, we know ahead of time that God has already given us every provision that we need to be able to go through even if the worst thing happens, and that's a place of great strength and comfort; that is a place of great confidence and security; that is a place that gives us the ability to live with courage and to give a death blow to those nagging fears of, "What if? What if? What if?" Well, in Psalm 79, what if had become what is and we find the psalmist being able to work his way through it.

It's a Psalm of Asaph, it says, and the setting for Psalm 79 is the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of Jerusalem which was also the setting for Psalm 74 which we studied a while back. The nation of Babylon invaded Jerusalem in 586 BC and Scripture tells us a lot about that event. It tells us what happened and it also tells us why it happened and I'd like to quickly review a couple of key Old Testament passages along those lines to kind of give us a running start as we head into Psalm 79. So turn in your Bibles to 2 Kings 25, and we're also going to be looking at 2 Chronicles 36. So 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36.

You know, it's easy to forget sometimes that as we read these accounts, that we read about real life flesh and blood people who were of like flesh with us, and in 2 Kings 25, beginning in verse 8, we read what happened when Jerusalem was sacked by Babylon and they were carried off into exile. Verse 8 says,

8 Now on the seventh day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire. 10 So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 11 Then the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the people, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile. 12 But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.

So if you picture, as sometimes I'll say, picture what actually happened in our nation's history, picture the capital city of Washington, DC being attacked, the place of power, the place where the American presence is manifested, and the Capitol building is destroyed, and the White House is burned with fire and the monuments are broken down, and everything that you had lived for and everything that we had built our national existence on is lying desolate in smoking ruins and the houses of even our loved ones and our friends and our own houses have been ransacked. That's a little bit of a picture of what was the actual experience of the Jews in this day.

Look at verse 13 and think about now it extends into the religious realm. You know, if a mob attacked our church and this beautiful facility that we enjoy was destroyed and carried off and broken and everything that we associate with our worship is suddenly just violated grossly, this is what they experienced in a far greater way because the temple was a far greater place of worship than what we have today. Look at verse 13,

13 Now the bronze pillars which were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea which were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried the bronze to Babylon. 14 They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the spoons, and all the bronze vessels which were used in temple service. 15 The captain of the guard also took away the firepans and the basins, what was fine gold and what was fine silver.

And on and on it goes.

Look at 2 Chronicles 36. This is a very sobering time. This is one of the great events of the entire Old Testament. In 2 Chronicles 36:15, we get God's perspective on what happened and why it happened. 2 Chronicles 36, beginning in verse 15.

15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place;

This is prior to the fall of Jerusalem. God sent his prophets to warn them, he called them to repentance, to call them back to the true worship of God, but what did they do? Verse 16,

16 but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy. 17 Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand. 18 All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. 19 Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. 20 Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

So from a couple of different historical passages we see the background that lies behind Psalm 79. A military conquest has taken place and the people of Jerusalem have been slaughtered. All of their city, their temple had been destroyed and their men had been carried off and there were dead bodies in the street. It's a very bleak time and it is from that perspective that this Psalm 79 is written. God had brought his judgment on his people and, beloved, the stroke was severe. What we see here in this Old Testament time is a display of the holiness of God and the fact that he intends his word and his holiness to be taken seriously. When it was defiled and defied by his people, there were consequences of an immense sort that came down upon them. He warned them in advance, they hardened their heart and went in their way, and this was the result of it. In Psalm 74, the destruction of the temple was highlighted. You could go back and listen to that message to review. What we find here in Psalm 79 is the psalmist mourning the destruction of God's people themselves, and so this is a very mournful setting for this Psalm and yet, as I said at the start, we still find the sufficiency of Scripture and we find the sufficiency of Christ, the sufficiency of God, even displayed in the midst of his own discipline of his own people to this very great degree.

Well, let's look at, first of all, this mournful lament, a mournful lament that opens this Psalm and this Psalm opens and begins with a description of the profound loss and the profound sorrow that attended this loss and destruction that we just read about, and Psalm

79:1, Asaph brings his petition before God and describes what the result of these actions were. Verse 1,

1 O God, the nations have invaded Your inheritance; They have defiled
Your holy temple; They have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

The breadth of the calamity is staggering. Remember the course of Israel's history as we consider these things. Remember how God delivered them from Egypt and brought them into the land and over time through the judges and through the ministry of others, brought David in to bear and David led the nation and then Solomon built this magnificent temple and Israel was the glory of the nations at the time, so much that people were coming from far and near in order just to hear the wisdom of Solomon. This was a nation with a glorious history that we read about as we read the earlier history of the Old Testament, and it was evident and it was true that God had chosen this people and chosen this city and chosen this temple as a place where he would uniquely manifest his presence and manifest his glory not only to his people but as a shining light to all of the world, and the magnificence of the temple worship and the magnificence of their privileged position was now a smoking pile of rubble. The chosen city, the temple, were lying in ruins and 400 years after those glorious days, pagans had defiled what for 400 years was the place where God had manifested his presence and his chosen kings had ruled, and these pagans, these Babylonians, had come and shown no regard for the land, no regard for the temple, no regard for the people. It was slash and burn throughout the entire military conquest and yet, beloved, it was more than just the physical structures that were violated, it was God's people themselves that were laying out in the open.

Look at verses 2 and 3 with me, the psalmist declaring the situation to God, pouring out his heart in the midst of the overwhelming nature of his grief says in verse 2,

2 They have given the dead bodies of Your servants for food to the birds
of the heavens, The flesh of Your godly ones to the beasts of the earth.

"God, Your chosen people, the bodies of Your chosen people are being eaten by animals. What kind of way is this to manifest Your presence? What kind of way is this for Your glory to be displayed? God, look on this horrific situation."

He says in verse 3,

3 They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem; And
there was no one to bury them.

The bodies of their dead were desecrated. Derek Kidner says in his commentary on the Psalms, he says and I quote, "To lie unburied was the final humiliation. It was as though one had departed unloved and of no account, as disposable as an animal."

So, again, I ask you to put yourself in their shoes. You're looking around at the ruins and you're seeing the bodies being desecrated and it is absolutely overwhelming. I would

venture to say, I don't want to say too much, but I would say the magnitude of what the psalmist was facing exceeds anything that any of us have ever known or experienced. For all of the depths of the struggles that some of us have been through over the years, this was a calamity of such a national scale and of such great spiritual significance that it seemed like an overturning of all of biblical history and the entire purpose that God chose his people, and the indignation that he feels here in verses 2 and 3, is that these are the bodies of God's chosen men. "God, these people, these men deserve at least a decent burial to affirm their worth and yet, God, even that basic custom of life has been violated here. The final dignity afforded to our dead was withheld from us." This was an utter devastation that must have brought him close to an utter fracture of his mind and it's in that circumstance that Psalm 79 is composed.

Now look at verse 2 with me for just a moment here again, look at it a little more closely. Notice how he says, "They have given the dead bodies of Your servants, The flesh of Your godly ones." Even in the midst of this there was something of a godly remnant and we see one of the realities of war and one of the realities of God's judgment is that sometimes the effect falls even on those who are comparatively righteous and that war is no respecter of person, and God's judgment sometimes will fall and the stroke will be severe even on those who by comparison don't share in the depth of all of the guilt.

Well, onlookers from outside of Israel would look on that destruction and mock them. Look at verse 4, adding insult, adding literal insult to literal injury, the psalmist says speaking of the chosen people, he says,

4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors, A scoffing and derision to those around us.

In addition to all of the massive loss around them, there is this mocking insult coming from their enemies. "What kind of God do you have that would allow this to take place? Has your God been defeated? Has your God abandoned you? Where is he?" And under the circumstances, there is no answer to that question. There is nothing that they can point to that would point to the favor of God still abiding on them or to even be able to respond to the fact that, yes, our God is sovereign when sovereignty is measured by military conquest and military victory. So the loss of the chosen city and its people, the loss of respect, the loss of economy, the loss of religion, the loss of spiritual encouragement bring a pain that is of a great mournful quality that really probably surpasses anything that we can completely understand. This is utter devastation that he is describing and yet, the Psalm doesn't stop there; and yet we find by the mere fact that he is writing this Psalm and praying to God in this manner, that he had not abandoned all hope, that somehow there was a flickering flame of faith that was animating his life and animating his thinking and animating his heart even in the midst of that. Here even in this, we see the persevering power of true salvation because this would have destroyed any other kind of man.

As we go into verse 5, we see our second point for this evening, we see a cry for justice. A cry for justice. He has poured out in lament the circumstances with which he finds

himself, now he pivots and he begins to make petition to the Lord, having poured out his heart in those prior four verses. Now let's see as he pours out his heart asking God questions and coming to grips with the magnitude of the loss. Verse 5, he says,

5 How long, O LORD? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

"How long" is not a question, it's not a request, I should say, for chronological information. He's not asking, "Will it be three months? Will it be six months?" His question is not calling for an answer in the concept of time. This is a desperate prayer for God to intervene and help. "God, how long will this go on," meaning, "God, how long will it be before You intervene and start to turn the situation?" It's a desperate plea for God to act in the midst of this utter devastation.

God's jealousy there at the end of verse 5, "Will Your jealousy burn like fire," is a synonym for his anger, for his wrath. The psalmist recognizes that God has brought severe discipline on his people but then he starts to, in a sense, argue with God. He starts to state his case before God. He starts to plead the comparative merit, for lack of a better term, the comparative position may be better stated, of God's people versus the enemies who have done this to them. Even recognizing that the enemies were an instrument in the hand of God, they were still the enemies of God's people and here were the Jews as his chosen people on the receiving end of this wrath and with great spiritual insight, with a great appeal to the nature of God, in verses 6 and 7 he asks God to turn his wrath toward the enemies with a plea of covenant faithfulness, of an appeal to covenant promises as his basis to do so.

Look at verses 6 and 7. He says, "God,

6 Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You, And upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Your name.

There is this implied contrast that he is making. He's saying, "God, You have poured out Your anger on us, the stroke of discipline has fallen on us but, God, can I remind You as the smoke rises from the rubble around me, can I remind You that we are Your chosen people by Your own choice and the ones that have done this to You do not call on Your name. We do. We know You. You are our covenant God and those nations do not know You like we do. They don't know You, they don't call on You. God, isn't it obvious to You even from Your own perspective that is the nation, they are the people that ultimately deserve Your wrath, not us? Shouldn't they be on the receiving end? They have delighted in our death. God, shouldn't You be turning Your attention to them and away from us?"

So he appeals to their status as a covenant people as a grounds for relief from this and he goes on in verse 8 and begins to appeal for mercy. He's asked God to turn his attention to the nation that did this, now he asks for mercy on the people of God in verse 8. He says,

8 Do not remember the iniquities of our forefathers against us; Let Your compassion come quickly to meet us, For we are brought very low.

Beloved, do you see yet once again after we just finished the study on Jonah on Sunday, this appeal to sovereign compassion once again. "God, You are a God of compassion and so look on us in our low estate, look on us, if You see our iniquities, let Your compassion come quickly to meet us because we are lower than low. We are brought very low," he says. "God, this is a time for You to display that sovereign care, that sovereign compassion, that love, that grace, that mercy that You are known for, those aspects of Your kindness that are intrinsic to Your glory. Have mercy on us." It's a plea for forgiveness, a plea for grace, a plea for deliverance from the cumulative guilt of past and present generations.

You know, one of the things that helps him write this in the midst of such calamity is the fact that if they had survived at all, if there was this lingering, small, tiny remnant still faithful to God, still calling out on him even though every ground of existence had otherwise been removed from them, if they had survived all of this, then there is something to be detected there; there is something to be detected and this applies even as we sit here together in this room tonight. If we're alive and we're breathing, whether you're on the older end of life or the younger end of life, if we're the people of God and we are alive even in desolate circumstances, God must have a purpose that's still at work. God must have a purpose otherwise he would have taken the rest of us as well. And here in the midst of your trials this evening wondering, "How do I go forward from here? How am I able to move forward after what has happened, happened to me, happened to the people that I cared about, after that kind of destruction, God, here I am still breathing, still living, still moving on. God, I detect in my continued breathing and existence and the fact that I can call upon You, that there is a purpose that You have for me and I ask You according to Your compassion, grace and kindness, to fulfill that purpose of grace that still lies ahead even though there is nothing around me to feed me with any hope."

Look, beloved, we're family here, almost all of you are either here every Tuesday or you are members of our church. We must come back to these things in the midst of our darkest times, in the midst of our darkest circumstances. We must come back when our lives are threatened, when our well-being is threatened whether by physical circumstances or by enemies or by something else, and there seems to be no way forward. Well, beloved, step back and remember the nature of your covenant keeping, promise keeping God, come back and we'll look at this at the end, come back to the cross and look at your situation and just take yourself in the hand and remember something really really simple and basic. I wish I had heard this 30 years ago, it would have saved me a lot of heartache. Lay hold of the reality, lay hold of the fact that your God has not changed. The God who was merciful to you at the beginning of your salvation is a God who is merciful now, and even though clouds have somehow hidden the sunshine of his presence, the sun hasn't moved, the sun hasn't disappeared; none of you have looked at the overcast of the past couple of days, it never occurred to you to think, there was never a possibility in your mind, "Do you know what? I can't see the sun and therefore I'm sure it's gone." You know that that's not the case. Well, take what you understand in the

physical realm and realize that the clouds of a dark providence have overshadowed you that the sun of the love of God, the sun of his faithfulness has not been extinguished by that, and lay hold of that. Grab hold of that and don't wait for the turning of the circumstances to express this kind of faith and to say, "God, I know You're still a God of compassion even though I can't see You right now, even though I can't feel You right now. I know grounded in Your word that You are and so I ask you, O God, let that compassion come quickly to meet me because, God, in these circumstances I am brought very low. I don't have a friend to encourage me. I don't have hope that this loss can be changed. I don't know where to turn, God. I call upon You as the God of compassion."

And what I want you to see is that bring some maturity to our perspective on what faith looks like. You know, Faith is not this instrument that means that we're always cheery all the time. You see faith being manifested here in the darkest of circumstances and with a sense that, "I am under divine discipline here. God, how long will You be angry? Is this going to go on forever?" And yet faith in the midst of that appeals to the attributes of God, appeals to the character of God with a sense of confidence that his character has not changed and that he is still favorably disposed toward us even though we don't feel it or see it in our immediate circumstances. You know, it's just a continual pastoral burden of mine to say things like this to people, and as we go through life together and a lot of us go through different circumstances of trial and discouragement, we kind of bear these things together, don't we, as we walk through these things as fellow believers in Christ. Well, it's a burden of mine as the pastor of this church is to have the sense that we don't have such a childish immature view of faith that life is always going to be happy. Sometimes life is going to be more in the realm of Psalm 79, of difficulty and great discouragement, and if you have a false view of what faith does and what faith looks like as if it's something that I'm happy all the time, then your situation is going to go from bad to worse because you're going to lose hope and say, "I don't even have faith here because I'm not happy in the midst of this."

Well, here we see faith appealing to the character of God in the midst of it, not relying on its feelings for the sense of God's presence and, beloved, even in the midst of your setbacks, in the midst of your adversity, there is strong hope, strong encouragement, yes, in the character of God, but yes, also in the fact that if you are still breathing, there is still an ongoing purpose of God at work in your life whether you see it or not. Here's what that does to your soul, here's what this does to your soul: it gives you a sense of nobility and a sense of courage. "Humanity may look at me as a failure, humanity may look at me as abandoned by God, but I know that not to be true," and in the midst of that you find a sense of courage and a sense of purpose to continue moving forward even if it's just to say, "I'm going to live for one more day. I'll hang on for one more day if God's purpose is still at work in me." You know, if God's purpose in you is finished, you would not be here breathing tonight.

So the fact that here in Psalm 79 the psalmist had survived, he detects an ongoing purpose of God. Now, that's a noble commendable faith. It's a commendable faith but what we're going to find in this commendable faith is that this isn't just a commendable faith that he has manifested up through these first eight verses, we're going to see that the

ground of his appeal ultimately has even a higher motivation. It's not for this psalmist, it's not just about his personal circumstance at all, it's not just about relief, and for us in our circumstances, oh, does verse 9 challenge us and beckon us to the mountaintop of where faith should go in the midst of your adversity.

Look at verse 9 with me. The ground of his appeal for God's help in the midst of the destruction of Jerusalem is the highest of all motivations. Verse 9, look at it with me. It staggers the heart. It activates the tear ducts in our eyes to see a man under this weight of affliction praying this kind of prayer of aspiration. Verse 9,

9 Help us, O God of our salvation,

Why? What is the motivation for that prayer for help? Why are you asking for help, Psalmist Asaph? Why are you praying this way? Look at verse 9 and let it jump off of the page at you. Verse 9,

9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; And deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.

Do you see it, beloved? You can't miss it, it's right there on the surface of the page. You know, we don't go into hidden mysteries that you have to take my word for, these are things that are just right on the text that you can read for yourself and see plain as day. We're not making any of this stuff up. His cry for help is motivated by more than a desire for relief. This psalmist is concerned for God's reputation as he asks for deliverance from the enemies and for forgiveness of sin. God even in the midst of his affliction, let's put it this way, even in the midst of this dire situation, his concern is not ultimately about himself, not ultimately for relief, although that's included in it, the higher motivation, the basis upon which he prays is the glory of the name of God and that is obvious.

Look at verse 9 with us again. Let's linger over that for just a moment. "God, for the glory of Your name, God for Your name's sake show us this kind of compassion." He's concerned for God's reputation. He's concerned for the way that God is viewed. He is concerned that God would be ascribed the glory that is due to his name and, "God, the way that You deal with Your people will inform the way that people ascribe glory to You." It won't increase God's actual intrinsic Shekinah glory, that can't be improved upon, that can't be added to, it's already inexhaustible and infinite, but the way that God is perceived and the praise that people give to him will be informed and energized if God answers this prayer. And beloved, I know this convicts me to bring out what we're talking about right now, this concern for the glory of God in the midst of praying in the midst of our affliction, but as you read this Psalm, you find this God-centered focus woven throughout everything that he says and you can see it by his use of the second person possessive pronoun "Your." Look at verse 1, we'll go back and we'll review some of these things so that you can see it with that perspective. This God-centered focus, "God, this is ultimately about You, not about me. Yes, my circumstances inform it and, God, I would like to be out from under this affliction but, God, I want more than just relief from my circumstances, I want Your name to be exalted. I want Your name to be glorified. I want

people to see You as great and the worthy God that You are and that's what I care about ultimately here, Lord."

Look at verse 1. We'll just go through this rather quickly. "Lord, it's about Your inheritance. Your holy temple." Verse 2, "Your servants. Your godly ones." Verse 6, "Your wrath. Your name." Verse 8, "Your compassion." Verse 10, "Your servants." Verse 11, "Your power." Verse 13, "Your people. Your pasture. Your praise." Do you see it? He's going to God, he's going into the presence of God to pray not simply to get horizontal relief from the things that are breaking his heart and discouraging him, this Psalm is anchored in a vertical perspective that is concerned greatly for the glory of God. And, beloved, there are probably few things that I know of when you see this kind of God-centered praying in the midst of this kind of awful affliction, a few things that will expose, I won't speak for you, that expose my own spiritual poverty than seeing the glory of God put as the central motivation for prayer in the midst of that kind of affliction. Isn't it true that in our affliction we're very eager to ask for relief, we're very eager to have the circumstances changed, to have a sudden reversal and turn of circumstances to the better, to want that and to make that the focus, "God, my earthly circumstances, my earthly hurts, my earthly discouragements," and to just ask and appeal on the basis of who God is to change that, neglecting and overlooking the glory of God in the process? Well, it's really humbling.

You see, beloved, this is important, the glory of God should be supreme in your affections even in the worst of your sufferings. 1 Corinthians 10:31, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. When God appoints prosperity to you, "Yes, God, thank You. To God be the glory." When his providence finds fit to give you affliction of a physical or financial or spiritual nature, to humble yourself enough to come back, remember who God is, remember that his glory, I say this sympathetically and with a tender heart to every one of you because I know, I've been there and I've failed in this far more than I've succeeded or remembered to do, in the midst of those sufferings, to come and say, "God, what I most want here is for Your glory to be advanced. So take my suffering, take my affliction and, God, use it for the glory of Your name. As You bring this weight upon my soul, as You bring this weight upon my life, God, I abandon my concern for earthly circumstances at least for a while, long enough to say, O God, for Your name's sake, do what You'll do. O God, for the glory of Your name, help me. Not just help me, Lord, but help me so that Your glory would be better displayed through my life." I wish I could go back in time 30 years and pray that in the midst of some of the afflictions that I went through instead of the angry demanding way that I prayed at the time. I can't do that. I can repent of it and hope to do better the next time, I suppose, but what I want you to see, beloved, is that as we grow in Christ, as we grow in our spiritual development, as we grow in our sanctification, we start to take a different perspective even on our sufferings and there is this concern for God's glory to be manifested that we're concerned about. Here in Psalm 79 since his preeminent concern is the glory of God, he asks God to act lest the enemies of God blaspheme the name of God.

Look at verse 10 with me. He's concerned about God's glory among the nations and he says, remember in verse 9, "Help us for the glory of Your name, for Your name's sake,"

and then he gives arguments; he persuades God with his perspective on the circumstance. He says in verse 10,

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

Remember this is what we were saying earlier. The defeat of a nation was proof in the day that our God was greater than your God, and he's saying, "God, You're the real God, You're the true God, You're the only God. Here we are in desolation, why should they be allowed to say where is our God when You're the true God and their gods are nothing? Why would You allow that, God? That is inconsistent with Your own glory. Forget about me, God, this is inconsistent with Your own glory. This calls for You to act."

Verse 10,

Let there be known among the nations in our sight, Vengeance for the blood of Your servants which has been shed.

He's saying, "God, show them in real time that You have not forgotten Your people, that You have not lost Your power. Vindicate Your name by turning the tables on them."

Then in verse 11, you see that there's this horizontal concern to his prayer as well, horizontal but not inward; horizontal in its concern for the people of God who are affected by this. Look at verse 11. This is a moving prayer. You feel the groan in what he's saying here as he thinks about his fellow people. Verse 11,

11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; According to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are doomed to die.

Remember this is a time of war and so what he's praying here for is he's praying for God to spare the lives of those who are prisoners of war in Babylon captivity who were facing death at the hands of the enemy. "God, in the midst of their affliction, have compassion on them. Spare their lives. Act in such a way that would spare them from their own sorrow, their own affliction in the midst of this."

Then in verse 12 he says,

12 And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom The reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

It's his final plea for justice. He asks God to bring retribution on his enemies that is worse than what happened to Israel. Out of a spirit of just spiteful revenge? No, because in bringing greater payback upon the enemies of his people that he used for just a time, by bringing forth a greater judgment on them he would show forth the magnitude of his glory and, "God, by overcoming this defeat with a greater victory in the future, Your glory will be vindicated and that's what I care about. That's what I want. That's what I pray for. Sevenfold, Lord, manifest Your glory to that great degree."

Well, finally in the third and final portion of this Psalm, you see his pledge of praise, his pledge of praise, and here again we see the full-orbed maturity of biblical faith being expressed. He has faith enough to bring his lament before God knowing that he can pray honestly before God and that God will receive him and not turn him away as he describes the difficulty of things in verses 1 through 4. You see his prayer of confidence and you see his prayer of concern for the glory of God in his plea for justice, "God, remember Your own glory." This is magnificent, the multifaceted nature of this prayer is wonderful and now we see it even going to a further mountaintop in what he says in verse 13. Again I ask you to remember the context in which he's praying, the context of the desolation of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is gone. "Our capital city, the place where You manifest Your presence, God, Jerusalem is gone," is the context of what he's praying, and yet in verse 13, he looks to the future with a sense of confidence that God will answer his prayers and he pledges a faithful response of worship when it comes.

Verse 13 he says, "So God, when You've done what I've asked in this prayer, here's what will happen from our perspective, God." Verse 13, "So when You do this, here's what's going to happen. We pledge to You, we vow to You

13 So we Your people and the sheep of Your pasture Will give thanks to
You forever; To all generations we will tell of Your praise.

He rests in God's care as the Shepherd of his people. Psalm 23, we saw this in Psalms 77, we saw it in Psalm 78. It's a recurrent theme in this section of the Psalter. I love seeing those things that cross from Psalm to Psalm. In fact, look at Psalm 80:1, you'll see it again, "Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel." So this section of the Psalter is marked by this metaphor of God as the Shepherd of Israel and they rest in God's care as a shepherd. What does a shepherd do? He provides for his sheep. He protects them. He guides them. He says, "God, we're sheep, we're Your sheep, and I am appealing that You will give that protection and that provision and that guidance which we need because, Lord, we are at Ground Zero and the bombs have just gone off," figuratively speaking, "and there is nowhere for us to turn." And he says, "God, I have enough confidence in You to tell You that when You do answer, we will thank and praise You when that time comes." It's a prayer that, "God, You turned this colossal loss into a time of gratitude and worship from Your people," and when you see them going back in the days of Ezra, days of Nehemiah, you find that praise being returned.

Beloved, let's bring it into today. Let's talk about it from the perspective of Christ for just a moment as we close. It is a substantial step forward in spiritual maturity to see your worst trials from this kind of perspective. The godly man, the godly woman, the godly young person, seeks more from God than simply relief from their trials. Anybody can do that. Beloved, I've said that so many times. You don't even need to be a Christian to want God to help you get out of your difficulty, do you? The most self-centered person would be happy to have God do that for them and it's not a mark that they are born again. Oh yes, we should go to God in prayer in such times. Oh yes, it is right for us to ask for our daily bread in the midst of our affliction. Oh yes, God sympathetically hears and cares for

us when we do. But beloved, we grow beyond that. Scripture calls us beyond that. We want more than relief from trials because we understand that we're not preeminently living for this life, we are preeminently living for the glory of God. That is what our ultimate motivation is. That is our ultimate heart affection. That is what we most care about. "So, God, in my loneliness, God, in my sorrow, God, in my affliction, God, in this time of hardship, God, I ask You to use this trial somehow to bring glory to Your name. Help me along the way but, Lord, not just for me, ultimately so that Your praise would be seen, that Your greatness, that Your faithfulness, that Your love and compassion on Your people would be known, and that my life would thereby become a vessel by which people see and respond in giving You praise and glory."

That applies across the board to whatever we're going through and what a comfort it is that in our most desolate situations God receives our prayers like that. This psalmist with no external promptings to give him this sense of confidence, this psalmist called for mercy and expected God to answer. He expected it. He said, "God, when the time comes when You deliver us, we'll give thanks to You forever." Look at the end here in verse 13 because we've talked about this a lot in recent weeks also, "To all generations we will tell of Your praise." So profound is this Psalm that not only is he not captivated by his immediate circumstances, this closes on a note that, "God, we are going to declare Your praise to people who haven't even been born yet." That's how confident he is.

As we read, beloved, these kinds of Old Testament prayers, as we read Psalm 79, I always like to end on this note, this kind of note, I want to remind you, I want to comfort you, I want to encourage you with the fact that our ground for hope in this God is even more firmly established than anything he had in the Old Testament because what we have to ground our hope on is Christ himself. We see that this God became man, went to the cross to secure our salvation from sin in love, kindness, mercy, grace and patience; had compassion, sovereign compassion on our souls to save us, to love us, to make us the children of God; to forgive all of our sins and display beyond dispute at Calvary that his love for us was real, that his intentions for us were good, that full reconciliation is available at the cross.

Look at Romans 8. I should turn to this passage with you far more often than I do, but it brings it to a focus for us that lets us walk out with a sense of confidence, a sense of serenity, a sense of peace, a sense of praise. Verse 35 of Romans 8,

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we rest in the love of Christ. We rest in His righteousness. We rest in His shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins and we know that through faith in Christ alone, we are fully reconciled to You. We have a perfect justification that cannot be diminished that will survive the final day of judgment. We are secure in Christ and, God, we thank You for that. We rest in His love this evening as we close. Even in the midst of our discouragements, even in the midst of the worst of life's trials, even in the midst of unspeakable calamities that have come to those that we love and care about in recent days, weeks and months, Father, we look to Christ and we find our all and we ask You, Father, in the midst of our affliction that You, Father, in this moment we do what we so often fail to do, we ask that in the midst of our affliction that You would glorify Your name. We pray, Father, not that our will would be done but that Thine would be done. We pray not for earthly comfort so much as what we pray for, heavenly glory to come down and be manifest through all of these things. Father, we will rest in Christ, we will glorify Him, we will worship Him throughout all of eternity and, Father, as we look forward to that certain eternal outcome, we bring it back into the presence and we find a security which enables us to give You grateful worship even at this time. Father, our security in Christ, the love of Christ, the love of God manifested to our souls in Him, Father, no wonder that we want Christ's glory to be our highest priority and, Father, we pray that His glory would unify our response to everything in life. So Father, though we walk through affliction with the psalmist, we come out in the same place that he did. Deliver us that we might give You thanks forevermore. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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