

Selections from the Psalms | Joy • Lament • Jesus

04 Why Does Evil Go Unchecked?

July 2, 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

On May 26th of this year, 8-10 gunman opened fire on a group of Coptic Christians in Egypt. The terrorist boarded their bus, stole jewelry from the women, and then filmed the executions. They left behind leaflets celebrating their religious beliefs. Some survivors from the bus attack reported that the terrorist attempted to force them to denounce Christ, most did not!¹ Twenty-nine men, women, and children lost their lives that day for primarily being Christians. Senseless killings of our brothers and sisters; a true defilement of God and his people.

A few days later in the Philippines a gunman carrying a container of gasoline set fires to a hotel-casino. Islamic State militants claim the attack and said it was on “a gathering of Christian combatants”, 36 bodies were recovered from the fires.²

Another senseless killing of people. Does this make you hurt? Does this make you wonder why does evil abound seemingly unchecked? Well, this is what Ps 79 is asking...

What we have here in Psalm 79 is invasion and oppression; it is an overthrow of the people of God. This community lament was brought about because of the great disaster that fell on

¹ http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/may/terrorists-kill-26-christians-bus-egypt-monastery-minya.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+christianitytoday%2Fctmag+%28Christianity+Today+Magazine%29

² https://world.wng.org/content/a_week_full_of_terror

Jerusalem at the hands of, most likely, the Babylonians.³ These conquerors have not played nice and violently have taken over God's stuff; they have disrespected God and his people and their place. So the people look towards God and rightly ask the same question we often ask, "How long, how long will evil go unchecked?"

This Psalm begins with giving their lament (1-4), then pleads with God to respond (5-12), and in a strong show of faith ends with confidence in God's authority (13). There's our handles, lets dive in...

II. THE LAMENT.. READ 1-4

A. We find the story behind this lament in Micah 3 with references in other OT prophets. It also had been prophesied that not only would Jerusalem be ruined but their bodies would be food for the birds (Deut. 28:26; Jer. 7:33; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20).

Micah informs us that Israel and its rulers and prophets had acted in detestable ways, the rulers took bribes, priest taught for financial gain, the prophets practiced divination for money, they all lacked justice, made crooked straight paths, and filled Jerusalem with iniquity; so, "Therefore," to quote Micah 3:12, "*because of you [Israel's rulers and prophets] Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins...*" So here in this Psalms we see what the people were feeling and thinking in the midst of such an invasion.

³ Crossway Bibles. *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008.

They, obviously, are beside themselves with grief at the detestable ways they have been treated—they are hurting deeply. All aspects of the prophesy came true, which by the way, they did not believe would happen. When Micah warned them they said, “*Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us*” (Micah 3:11). Despite their blatant disregard, they still know who to cry towards, their only hope is God alone!

III. GOD, PLEASE RESPOND (5-12)

After the lament, the Psalmist then poses the question of How long will this continue? How long will evil go unchecked? He implies those questions through asking how long God will be angry with them and his jealousy burn.

This is our first indication they are acknowledging their fault, their disobedience, their pursuit of other loves. All the warnings, as we just saw, indicate a strong rebellion on the part of God’s people and indicated a coming captivity.

But it does not change nor stop them from crying towards God, they do not abandon but grow in dependence. Notice God does not strike them down for those questions. They are right questions, just because they have failed does not mean that they long any less for the trampling of God’s name to stop. They are most grieved at his name being marred!

- A. *To the evil...* the Psalmist does not hold back in asking God to respond to the evil
 1. Pour out your anger...an intense call for God to direct his anger away from them and towards those who have “*devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.*”
 2. The Psalmist ask on behalf of the people that God’s avenging of his servants be done to make clear to all

nations that they indeed were God's people because God responded to the injustices.

3. Their groans be in his ears
 4. Return seven fold to those who taunt...a real intensity to have God responded so his name would not be disrespected, by those who don't know him and his own people...which leads to the next plea
- B. *To us* (**READ** 8-9)...in a surprising twist they acknowledge their part, apparently this captivity was brought about because of their lack of faithfulness to God, disobedience. They lamented over their own sin that caused national destruction.

They ask God to not remember their iniquities but rather let his compassion come speedily because they are low. It would be wise for us to consider our sinfulness in the sinfulness of the world around us.

The Psalmist is asking for God's compassion to make the heathen, the one who does not know God to come to know him, that he or she would no longer think because God's people had been overtaken, that God was powerless.

That God's name would be honored is a great plea and one that God will surely respond to. The great Spurgeon said, "Believers will find it their wisdom to use very frequently this noble plea [God's name]: it is the great gun of the battle, the mightiest weapon on the armory of prayer."⁴ When we become so radically God centered, we become concerned about his name being exalted not ours.

⁴ C H Spurgeon, *Treasury of David: Volume 2, Psalms 58-110* (Peabody, MA: Hendricks Publishing) p 378.

The ultimate reason all around for invasion, oppression and the like...is sin. Make no mistake, it is and will always be sin. That is why they pray and plead for God to atone for their sins, for HIS name sake.

So that he would be seen as God. Oh it does not take much to hear the echo of nails being pounding into the cross of God's Son in this plea...atone for our sins, atone for our sins, atone for our sins!

Usually the atoning came from sacrifices made in the temple but there is no temple...they must believe God could and would atone all of himself and they know they needed him to.

Surly they have no clue as to how but trust he would because they do not want their sin to taint his name. What a view of sin, "Do you view your sin as a tearing down of God's name; as a discrediting announcement of the work of God in Christ?" Perhaps this is why in this instances evil was unchecked; to bring God's people back to himself, to make clear the atrocities that await us when we become our own God.

IV. CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S AUTHORITY

- A. We your people, the sheep of your pasture!...they are confident and can still give praise precisely because of God's authority. It is only God who can save them from oppression and from themselves! God can and they believe will act on their behalf so they will give thanks not only now but forever. Amazing they give thanks in the midst of persecution.

They thank God for it and His working in and through it to all generations. In a real sense this lament has taught them things about themselves that they could only see through difficulty.

You see, God's sovereignty has not stopped their lament but heightened it to call out to him to respond. Though he warned and gave instructions and they rebelled they still believed in his shepherding care, in this moments that shepherding was revealed in letting them see and experience the destructiveness of sin and rebellion against God.

- B. Their failure does not diminish their longing for God to move and make things right again.

V. THE USE OF THIS PSALM IN THE NT

- A. The most popular uses of this Psalm in the NT is 1) to call people to repentance and 2) people using it's language to repent.⁵ This is primarily because this Psalms acknowledges their own need for God to work in their hearts more than their circumstance.

Not only did this Psalm offer words for the immediate context, but also for others who would walk through its same hurting. This is one of the primary functions of the Psalms in general; to give us words, expressions to offer towards God. This lament had brought about their own realization of sinful acts that led to invasion and oppression. The warnings are here on display in the lives of real people and the NT writers frequently remind the

⁵ Luke 6:38, 18:13, 21:24 / 1 Th 4:5

people of God to follow God not those “who do not know God” as 1 Thessalonians does.

VI. THEREFORE...

- A. Right lament leads us to mourn for our brothers and sisters who are mistreated
- B. Right lament leads us to pray for the injustice around us?
- C. Right lament leads us to considered our own destructive habits that would led us towards captivity and maybe I should add...disgrace God’s name.
- D. This is the most compelling thing about this Psalm—Right lament leads us to depend on God’s sovereign authority as our only hope, not political agendas. This psalm is a national crisis and notice they cry to God to right the wrong, to bring justice and right their wrongs as well.
- E. Non-believers...one of places this Psalm is quoted is Luke 18:13 about Pharisee and Tax collector who went up the temple to pray,The Pharisee went proudly and thanked God he was not like other sinners, even the tax collector...
“¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me (atone in Ps 79), a sinner!’¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”