



PSALM 79

Remembering How God Has Refined Us

This is Holly with Presence Point and this is our *Psalms for Shepherds* series. Today, we're in *Psalm 79*, a truly sorrowful song of Asaph, the priest who was lamenting what had taken place in Israel; the Babylonians had taken God's people captive, the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, and those that opposed God were in control.

Throughout these 13 verses, Asaph moves from mourning all that's happened, to addressing the suffering and seemingly feeling God's anger, to interceding on behalf of the Israelites, and worshipping God, promising that the people and future generations will praise Him and stand for God, if God would just deliver his people.

Listen as you can hear Asaph's mourning in the first four verses of *Psalm 79*.

O God, the nations have come into your inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple;
they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

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.

⁴ We have become a taunt to our neighbors,
mocked and derided by those around us.

Asaph's lament here is palpable. You can sense how Asaph feels and how he's trying with all he can to make sure God knows what's happened and how it can affect His holy name. But God knows. He permitted it. He lovingly and with great sadness Himself, watched what had to happen to His sheep to help them learn the importance of obedience.

Now, in verses 5 through 8, we hear Asaph as a sufferer, sensing God's anger and begging on behalf of his people for God to take his anger to those he felt deserved it more.

⁵ How long, O Lord?
Will you be angry forever?
Will your jealousy burn like fire?
⁶ 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.
⁸ Do not remember against us our former iniquities;
let your compassion come speedily to meet us,
for we are brought very low.

As I read this, I can picture Asaph on his knees begging God for mercy, begging Him to spare His people. The Father knows, however, the importance of consequences for a nation. Even though we are guilty before God only for our own sins, there are times when we may suffer because of the sins of our ancestors. This seemed to be the case with Israel at the time of their captivity.

Then, in verses 9 through 11, Asaph beautifully moves into his role as intercessor.

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!
¹⁰ Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants
be known among the nations before our eyes!
¹¹ Let the groans of the prisoners come before you;
according to your great power, preserve those doomed to die!

As I read this portion of *Psalms 79*, it's sweet and reassuring to me to know that we have an advantage over God's people in Asaph's time. Unlike how it was in that day, if we are united in Christ Jesus by faith, then no disaster that ever washes into our lives is because of God's frustrated anger. The Crossway Psalter reminds us that all of that type of God's anger was poured out on to Christ at the cross. In fact, when difficult circumstances arise in our lives, our God may be disciplining or training us to correct our behavior, or He may be chastening us – rebuking us to affect humility in our lives and our responses, or He may be testing us. But it is all out of love. Jesus washed away any reason for God to be angry with us in a punishing kind of way.

Lastly in this psalm, Asaph ends his song with a request to give to the neighboring nations what He had permitted for Israel and that, if God did so, Asaph promised God the people would praise Him and bear witness of Him. Verses 12 and 13.

¹² Return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors
the taunts with which they have taunted you, O Lord!

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.

And, in fact, there were sons of Asaph who left Babylon for Judah when the captivity ended, so Asaph's promise to the Lord was, indeed, fulfilled.

So, how does this psalm apply to us today? Well, if you've followed Jesus for any length of time, I'm sure you could speak of at least one circumstance in your life when whatever was happening felt like it was never going to end, when you cried out to God, "O Lord, how long?" When your lament and your suffering and your intercession included requests for relief and promises of serving Him more effectively on the other side of what you were facing.

Tell me there has not been at least one time in your life – professionally or personally – when you eventually knew that what God had permitted to happen in your life so that in some way, at some point, those circumstances would bring you to the humility He required in you to do His work or the training needed to correct your behavior in order that you could, in fact, impact others more powerfully for His purposes.

He does have a plan for our lives, fellow under-shepherd! Ephesians 2 tell us that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. He knows if there are circumstances that you and I need to experience to draw us closer to Him and to be better prepared to do what He planned for us long ago. And, He knows how to orchestrate them for our good and His glory every time if we let Him.

So, take a moment and ponder. What is happening in your life right now that you think He will use for His purposes? What are you lamenting or in the midst of suffering that will make you better equipped to influence and impact those you lead? Maybe it's time to write your own *Psalm 79*. If you do, He'll hear you.

If there's nothing you're facing at this moment, think of a circumstance the Father permitted in the past, in your life that disciplined or refined or tested you and, because of that circumstance, you know you are a better leader, a better shepherd. Maybe it's my age but I can think of so many as I look back.

Take a moment and then thank Him. Praise Him. Take a few moments to write or sing or say words of worship to Him for how He's led you.

Thank you for joining me today. May you live deeply into your calling as shepherd in the lives of those you influence this week.