

Help us, God our Saviour!

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[0:00] Well, in your lifetime, have you witnessed a scene of utter devastation?

! Perhaps the nearest in mine was on September 11, 2001.! I was a rather lazy student at university, and on that day I was in Colorado, in the USA, on my summer break. My father was working there. I was home alone at my parents' house, sleeping on the sofa. Suddenly, I got awoken by a phone call from my father, who was here in the UK. Mark, have you seen what's happening? I put the TV on, and it looked like a Hollywood action movie.

And then, I was on the TV. Planes were going into buildings, into tower blocks on my screen. I couldn't quite believe it. Then I panicked, as my dad told me Mum was flying to USA at that moment.

[1:10] It was a devastating scene that will be etched in most of our minds for the rest of our lives.

Here, likewise, the psalmist Asaph, who could not be the original Asaph, unless this was prophetic writing, sees the carnage, the fall of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC.

This is 400 years after David, when the first choir master, Asaph, was living. Davidic delight has turned into deep distress.

The people of God are in need, great need of great help. They are scattered like stray sheep, and they need that skillful shepherd.

Long gone are the days when there was peace, wealth, security, prosperity, fame, respect for the king. What does Asaph see?

[2:30] Let's turn to God's word. In verse 1. Oh God, the nations have invaded your inheritance. They have defiled your holy temple.

They have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. The nations have invaded God's inheritance. Israel, Jerusalem, that great fortress.

It's in ruins. The Babylonians have treated what was holy, sacred. The temple, the holy of holies. They've treated it as unholy, which would incur the death penalty in the biblical law. Desecration, a serious offence to God. Did you notice the bloodshed on the streets?

Verse 3a. They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem. Dead bodies are everywhere.

[3:30] A massacre has taken place. The last ritual of love. Burying the dead cannot be performed in verse 3b.

And there is no one to bury the dead. Apparently for Jews, this would have been the biggest tragedy. Not to be given a burial.

Instead, birds and beasts are eating their remains. In verse 2. They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth.

This is a prophecy that Jeremiah said would happen. And it did. You cannot really understand this horrific scene.

You had to have been there. Even for me, seeing those horrific scenes of 9-11, though horribly devastating, I was not there in the flesh.

[4:45] I was on my couch. I couldn't see, witness people jumping out of the twin towers, seeing the towers fall, perhaps hear the wailing of families who had lost loved ones.

To have been there, like the psalmist, must have been truly gruesome, horrific, deeply sad. He must have been scarred for life.

This must have left a sickening feeling in his gut. And the consequences in verse 4 are horrible as well.

We are objects of reproach to our neighbours, of scorn and derision to those around us. The people that are left in the city are now treated as objects of scorn, ridiculed for what has happened.

This must have been doubly bad for the psalmist. He is only alive by God's grace, his protection. He is one of the survivors.

[5:58] And now he is being taunted. The people are being taunted by the Babylonians. Laughing at them in their faces. Ha ha ha! Where is your God?

This scene reminds me of the film *Shinless List*, in how the Nazis treated the Jews during the Holocaust.

Such horror. Inevitably, this leads to the cry in verse 5. How long, O Lord, will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire? How long, O Lord? He questions twice. When will this suffering be over with?

Thankfully, he hasn't lost sight of God. He's crying to him. You see, when we are in similar situations, we can either capitulate, give up, look at the situation, lose faith in God.

[7:04] He's abandoned me. My feelings have rewritten my doctrine. Or, we can grasp hold of God and remember who he is.

Recall his clear teaching. And this will sustain us. Perhaps during the pandemic, you have felt like this. When will this be over with?

Brothers, sisters, we need to learn to hold on to God's truth. When we experience hardship. Hebrews 10.23 says this.

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess. For he who promised is faithful. Let's hold on to God.

Let's learn from Asaph. Asaph. We need to pray, cry out to him and explain our woes, our laments. Even though he knows all of them.

[8:16] Tell him all. In the midst of pain. In the midst of pain, Asaph continues to ask. Let's do the same as individuals and as a church.

Let's bring the situation to him. Lord, we need a new pastor. Your flock needs under shepherds. Help, Lord.

How long, Lord? Please act. Lord, look how small your church is in our city. Our nation. Lord, for your name's sake, grow your church.

Convert people. Change them. Make them new creations. Lord, bless our efforts in evangelism. Especially for Easter. For your glory, not ours.

So people will worship you and adore you, great gods. May our city of Brighton and Hope, our nation, turn to the living God from idols and live for you.

[9:21] Amen. The psalm then goes on. Verse 6. Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you.

On the kingdoms that do not call on your name. He asks God for retribution against the nations peoples who have committed these terrible atrocities.

He uses similar language in verse 12. Look at that with me. Pay into the laps of your neighbours seven times the reproach they have held at you, O Lord.

The number seven signifies completeness. And his prayer was answered in this way.

The Babylonians were defeated and God punished them for these acts. Friends, notice all this has happened because of three letters.

[10:27] S-I-N. Sin. Verse 8a. Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers.

The past generations. And the sin of the present generation. In verse 9. Verse 9b.

Deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. This is general sin and specific sin. Asaph knows that deliverance is needed.

And this comes with confession to God. There is no excuse. The people are culpable. Don't count our fathers' sin or our sin against us, Lord.

Lord, if you marked our transgressions, who would stand? Lord, have mercy, compassion. In verse 8. Do you see that?

[11:34] May your mercy come quickly to meet us. We are in desperate need. Be compassionate. Does this remind you of the parable of the lost son? Do you remember?

The father, a long way off, comes running to meet his wayward son and embraces him? In Luke 15, verse 20. So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Lord, have mercy. I wonder if you are a lost sheep or lost son tonight. Perhaps you are feeling helpless at home.

Perhaps you are deeply unhappy. You are far from God, the father. And you feel guilty about how you have thought, acted.

[12:42] Perhaps you've treated others badly. And more importantly, how you have ignored God. You've disrespected him. You haven't honoured him.

Well, tonight, you can simply come to the father and confess your selfish rebellion to him. And he will make you clean. Because he has sent his son to take all that sin that you have committed.

And he's taken it on the cross at Calvary. Dying for your shame. So that you can be restored. And made right in his sight. He longs for all to come into a relationship, a right relationship with him.

He loves you so much. Do that tonight, I beg you. Ask him into your life. Say, Lord, please forgive me of all the wrong I have done towards you and others.

And he will forgive you. He's a great saviour. Let's go on. Well, in verse 9, we see the crux of this psalm.

[14:01] This cry of help is first and foremost about the sake of God's name. All this devastation the psalmist sees in front of him hurts God.

His people are suffering. His holy temple has been desecrated. His inheritance has been invaded. His name has been taunted.

Yes, please deliver your people. Because it's your name that is being held in contempt. Our neighbours are not showing respect for who you are, Lord.

You are not being worshipped as you ought to be. Verse 10a. Why should the nation say, where is their God?

He does care about his reputation. Brothers and sisters. God has compassion.

[15:13] He has love for those who are suffering. And he does hear the groans of his people. 11a. May the groans of the prisoners come before you.

Wherever they are. Isn't that comforting to know? He hears Leah's cries as she groans in captivity in Nigeria.

He hears your cries in your situation. Verse 11b might be literal. It could be people are going to the execution.

Or it could be a picture. A metaphor of abandonment. Look at it. With your strong arm. Preserve those condemned to die.

Condemned to die. They perhaps see themselves under a sentence of death. But in conclusion. We are left with an amazing statement or promise.

[16:16] In verse 13. It is quite remarkable. Considering the predicament the psalmist is in. Imagine that you are in his shoes.

Perhaps looking at that bloody scene. Yet he still has faith to say. But we. Your people. The sheep of your pasture.

Will praise you forever. From generation to generation. We will proclaim your praise. Wow. What farsightedness.

He has not given in to despair. But boldly states. Despite the emptiness of his situation. We will praise you. Why?

Because God will hear his people. He will hear the prayers of his people. And he will answer it in his own time.

[17:18] He will rescue his people. And he will pour out wrath on his enemies. Peace. The psalmist is confident. That the great Yahweh.

The covenanting God. Will help. And he does. Read the history books. His story. You see friends.

God is a God who saves. That's his business. There is hope. There is hope. Like none other. As a Christian. No matter what troubles.

And perplexities. We encounter. He will hold us fast. A skillful shepherd.

Who went through much turmoil. Once said this. Even though I walk through the darkest valley. I will fear no evil.

[18:19] For you are with me. Surely your goodness. And love will follow me. All the days of my life.

And I will dwell. In the house of the Lord. Forever. Let's pray. Heavenly Father.

We thank you for this psalm tonight. Though it's a dark. Depressing psalm. Of affliction. Upon your people. We thank you. That we can draw so much out of it.

That despite the situation. The psalmist cries to you. And you hear his cry. Lord. Please hear our cries tonight.

Whatever situation we're in. Lord. It's been a difficult year. A difficult time. For us as a church. And individuals. Lord. You know our situation. You hear our cries. We thank you for that promise.

[19:20] That you will act. You will answer us. You love your people. You care for us. As sheep. You are that great shepherd.

That skillful shepherd. And tonight we give our lives over to you. May we look to you. And praise the Lord. Who is our shepherd. We shall not be in once.

Lord. We have everything we need. You give us everything. And we praise you. And we magnify you. From generation to generation. We will praise you. Lord.

Please keep us. Hold us fast. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.