

# God is good, He remembers his people

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit, our teacher, and your great glory, our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. God is good all the time, and all the time God is good. May this always be the beginning and the ending of our hope, the goodness of God, that God himself is the very measure and standard of everything that is good.

As the Lord Jesus said, no one is good except God alone. When a young child asks, why is the sky blue? Often their parent will reply, just because.

Now, that might mean, I really don't know why the sky is blue. Or it might mean, I do know, but it's a really complicated answer, and I'm not going to try and explain it to you.

Or indeed, it might mean, please stop asking me questions. However, there are some questions, and the answer really is, just because.

[ 1 : 37 ] There are brute facts, which need no other explanation. The universe exists. Newton's laws of motion or gravity, certain unchangeable physical phenomena, which just are.

Now, sometimes these brute facts trouble us. We are perplexed and constrained by them.

Sometimes they appear to be in conflict with the world as we observe it round about us.

As Mr. Scott famously said, you cannae change the laws of physics, Captain. No matter how frustrating and painful they are, we are left with these brute facts.

God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good. This is our brute fact.

We refuse the temptation to give up on this solid ground. We will never move away from the goodness of God, but we'll hold fast to it whatever storms or troubles rage around us.

[ 2 : 59 ] Last week in Psalm 73, the tempting question was, why do good things happen to bad people? This week in Psalm 74, the challenge to the goodness of God is human violence.

We remember that this part of the Psalter, Psalm 73 through to 89, is a selection of Psalms that are troubled and perplexed.

And these challenging questions to the brute fact of God's goodness arise within us. Sometimes as a species, we appear less Homo sapien than, or hold violence.

Not human violence, but violent humans. This is the problem. This is the challenge, which we observe in life around us, to the goodness of God.

Psalm 74 comes to us in three parts. Verses 1 to 11 begins and ends with the question, why, and introduces the painful problem of human violence.

[ 4 : 17 ] Verses 12 to 17 is a hymn of praise, a proclamation that God is king. And then verses 18 to 23, a prayer of pleading.

Pleading that God the king will remember his people, that he will show up and be the king, and do the work of the king for us, especially when we are in the dark places of violence.

It turns out the disciples of Jesus are always realists. We look at the world as it really is.

God's good and wonderful world has been marred by our human sin and our human violence. And yet we are filled with hope, even in this homo violence world.

The sure foundation of the goodness of God lifts up our head and fixes our eyes on God the king. God is good all the time.

[ 5 : 29 ] And all the time, God is good. Oh God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?

Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand, take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them? Why is always a painful question.

I really do wish that every time one of you had asked me why that I had an answer for you. I really do.

But you know that I don't. Why is a courageous question to ask of God? It absolutely depends upon the goodness of God that we are able to articulate the question why and direct it towards our God. If you were to ask some human monarch or some human president why, you could just as easily end up being thrown out or imprisoned as actually answered.

[ 6 : 45 ] To some monarchs and rulers, any question of why is always received as impertinent. Thanks be to God.

Our Father loves us. He knows the questions which rise in our hearts because of the painful experiences in our lives. And he always welcomes our questions.

God's not always going to answer us the way that we think he should. But he will always listen to our question. He will always reach out and pick us up and gather us in his strong arms and hold us in his goodness while we ask our painful questions.

Why are you angry with your people? This is where the psalm begins. The reality of violence in the community suggests that God is angry with his people.

If God was not angry, there wouldn't be this violence in the community. But there's violence in the community, therefore the psalmist suggests, are you angry with us?

[ 8 : 05 ] God did not create us to be homo-violence, violent people. Our lives are not supposed to be consumed in rage and anger and violence. The psalmist begins with the question about judgment.

Is violence in the community an expression of God's judgment upon us? Now for the psalmist, before the cross, sometimes God has used the violence of war and exile to express his judgment upon human sin.

But more often, we find as the psalm goes on, human violence is a result of human sin, human opposition to the goodness of God, human selfishness and greed, which results in violence.

Thirteen times, in verses 3 to 11, we read of foes or enemies, those who oppose God by their selfishness and their sin, those who express their enmity towards God in violence towards others. They were like those who swing axes in a forest of trees, and all its carved wood they broke down with hatchets and hammers. There is not only one way to display violence.

[ 9 : 40 ] Those verses in verses 5 and 6, we read of the violence against the temple, the destruction of the temple, the attempt to destroy the presence of God from the midst of the community.

But there is also the violence of destruction of homes, the destruction of essential services, water supplies, energy supplies, the violence of attacking food supplies, the violence of denying medical care, the violence of allowing somebody sharing food with another, the violence of immediate physical abuse, attacking persons and harming their bodies, the violence of death and bereavement.

If we restrict ourselves to just the first 25 years of this 21st century, we could all of us, without thinking too hard, fill in specific examples of all these kinds of violence.

And then we've got the violence of economics, pricing people out of their homes, the violence of zero-hours contracts, the violence of human trafficking, the violence of creation abuse.

There's more than enough violence to go around. Without leaving our city, we could come up with a big list of examples of all kinds of violence.

[ 11 : 20 ] Human violence, huh? What are you going to do about it? Shrug. That's the way the world is.

Shrug. Switch the telly off and put something else on. Last year I was in a church hall, not this church hall, another church hall, and after the service was talking with someone and we failed to speaking about the violence that's ongoing in Israel and Gaza.

And this person asked me, what are you doing about it? Following the example of the psalmist, I said, well, I'm praying about it. Only to be further asked, is that all?

Prayer is never, is that all? Never, ever. Taking our questions to God is not doing nothing.

Naming the violence we see around us, which troubles us, in the presence of God, is doing something. I don't get to be in the rooms where the decisions are made about the violence in Israel and Gaza, or Ukraine and Russia, or Sudan and South Sudan, or Nigeria, or a dozen other places.

[ 12 : 43 ] And neither do you. I don't get to pick up the phone and speak with presidents and prime ministers about the horrors of violence we see every day.

I don't get to talk with the chancellor of the Exchequer about how we can diminish the violence of economic stress that's happening in our country.

And neither do you. But every time I bend my knees to pray, I am gathered by the spirit of God into the throne room of God.

I find myself talking to the God who alone is good and who can do something about it. And so do you every time we pray.

This psalm assures us that prayer is doing something. And doing anything has got to be better than violence. What are you going to do about it?

[ 13 : 44 ] Because we hope in the goodness of God, we pray. We trust him to be the one to whom we bring our painful experiences of violence.

We trust him to be the one to whom we can hand over all these troubles. And trust that he will do something about it.

Because we hope in the goodness of God, we pray not only about the nice things, but about the violence we see all around us.

Verses 12 to 17 come crashing in and celebrate the brute fact of God's goodness and God's kingly reign. Yet God, my king, is from of old working salvation in the midst of the earth.

I'm in a number thing these weeks. 12 times in just six verses God is named. God is the subject of the pronoun you 12 times in six verses.

[ 14 : 50 ] It's like suddenly God, God, God, God, God, God, God, God all over the place. We do not sing about the enemies of God. We do not celebrate human violence.

Over all violence, we declare the kingly reign of God. Over every enemy, we proclaim Jesus is king and your violence isn't.

Verses 13 to 17 celebrate God's good power displayed in creation. God, by his word of power, spoke order over chaos.

God set limits for the seas and the waters. God graciously provides the beauty of the sunlight and the dependable order of the seasons. If our God is able to speak creation into being and by his power sustain all things, what human enemy, what possible display of human violence can triumph over him?

not one, not ever. Our singing hymns of praise to God is not talking to the wall. It is not pretending that somehow all will be well.

[ 16 : 12 ] Our songs of praise are an announcement of the reality of God's kingly reign over all creation. a declaration a declaration that God is king and human schemes and plans and violence are not the final word.

We can think of it this way. There might have been a nation where in that nation there was a particular region or one city which was renowned for violence and abuse.

a new king comes to the throne to rule over the whole nation a good king. But the rulers and citizens of that violent city refuse to recognize the good reign of the good non-violent king.

The king from his throne will send messengers or we might just as well call them missionaries. They might be sent with a declaration not a discussion topic not an invitation to a debate an announcement a proclamation.

There is a new king he calls upon the rulers and citizens of this violent city to give up their violence and to become active and productive members of his good kingdom.

[ 17 : 39 ] It does not matter if the citizens of that city reject the message. It doesn't make any difference if they abuse the messengers and carry on as before.

The reality is there is a king he is a good king he will come and overwhelm all the violence and put an end to that wickedness and establish his good reign.

When we sing our songs of praise we are those messengers declaring the kingly reign of God over all creation. I don't know what you think you're doing when you sing hymns but that's what you're doing.

Jesus reigns and he calls us to sing about it and in our singing we announce we proclaim his reign over all creation.

the final section of the psalm is a prayer a pleading a calling out to God to remember.

[ 18 : 53 ] Remember this O Lord how the enemy scoffs and the foolish people reviles your name. Arise O God defend your cause remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day.

I hope we know that in the Bible when God remembers he acts because he remembers. At the beginning of the Exodus when the people were suffering the violence of slavery in Egypt we read that God remembered his people and because he remembered them God acted to deliver them from violence to bring them out from the house of bondage.

And so we can pray in the words of Psalm 74 God remember your enemies remember those who reject you and your grace remember those scoffers who mock you and despise you remember and do something about them.

Notice that nowhere there in verses 18 to 23 does the psalmist presume to tell God what to do about the scoffers.

The psalmist rather trusts in the goodness of God. All he needs to do is to be in the presence of God to cry out to his father remember this situation and do something about it and he can trust that God will do what is good.

[ 20 : 37 ] So absolutely this prayer depends upon the brute fact of God's goodness God's powerful work in creation God's establishing his kingly reign.

Even though all the violence we see around us shouts loudly in our ears we hold fast to the goodness of God we have hope when we pray because God is good he will do something about this we need to trust him our good God overcomes all violence Jesus the prince of peace has triumphed over all violence by submitting himself to becoming a victim of human violence in his death on the cross wonder if you remember that great Isaiah chapter 40 the first couple of verses there comfort comfort my people says your God how are the people to be comforted speak tenderly to Jerusalem cry to her that her warfare is ended the violence which has engulfed and consumed the nation will be ended don't we love those verses in

Isaiah where we read about the lion lying down with the lamb about the spear and the sword being reformed into tools of food production we are not able to stop human violence we cannot stop ourselves in our own lives and our hearts being violent how can we stop the violence in anyone else's heart and life we just can't do it the evidence of human history suggests that if we are to stand in front of a tank we are going to get violently run over but we do well to remember that young man in Chanaman Square much more than we remember those who pulled the triggers or drove the tanks the days of human violence are numbered!

coming to an end at the end of the East Germany communist regime the troops and policemen in the secret police agency in East Germany said they were ready for anything they had expected violence bricks and stones and petrol bombs and all sorts of things to be thrown at them what they had not expected and could not overcome were Christian people kneeling before them and praying and they didn't know what to do and their guns and their violence was overcome by God's people kneeling in the street and praying for an end to violence Jesus is Lord he is establishing his victory over violence against creation violence against women and children any and all expressions of violence

Jesus is Lord and he has already the cross triumphed over them all we do not lose hope in the face of violence rather we take our painful questions about violence to God our father and we know that he will take hold of them for us we sing of our hope over all violence Jesus is Lord and his kingdom of grace and peace is growing and extending one transformed life at a time and as you more and more give your life to follow Jesus you get to be part of his growing kingdom of non violence we are not required to take arms against the sea of violence rejecting all violence we trust in God God will remember his people and his creation God knows what to do about violence better than we do!

[ 25 : 11 ] and he doesn't need us to tell him Jesus is Lord the saviour of Calvary has already defeated all human violence the darkness has been overcome and can never triumph over him we stand together and we sing his praise we declare his kingly reign Jesus is Lord of all God is good all the time and all the time God is good let's pray together father smile upon us even in the midst of this world of violence and trouble turn your face towards us and smile upon us for in your smile we have hope when you smile upon us we are encouraged to bring our troubled prayers to you and cry out to you and know that you will hear us smile upon us that the smile of your face might enlighten the cross of

Jesus to us call us there that we might be people of Jesus who follow the king and the prince of peace and extend your kingdom as we serve you bless us in this we ask it in Jesus name Amen holy