

Psalm 79:1-9 For the Glory of Your Name  
September 18, 2022

In 1 Timothy chapter 2, the apostle Paul wrote:

I urge . . . that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Much of the bible is written from the depths of despair, which came along with the circumstance in Israel of having been conquered. Sometimes it is hard for people like us to relate to the biblical message because we have *not* been conquered, thus we do not have a point of contact with those who have, especially with those in Israel about 2,500 years ago during the Babylonian crisis, or those who lived in its aftermath as did Jesus and Paul. It was not easy to lead peaceful and quiet lives.

One might even go so far as to say that the bible was *written for people who have been conquered*, and those who live in the aftermath of the defeat. It may get old to be talking about being conquered all the time in order to better understand the bible, when what we want when we come to church on Sunday mornings is to feel satisfied about our lives.

I wouldn't bring it up unless I believed that in order to understand the bible, one *must* at least know about

the context of trauma that pervades all the bible's content. I have spoken before of the idea that the story of Israel is the story of humanity, and if it was largely traumatic, then there can be a general sense that the trauma of Israel becomes the human trauma, not just in the sense of their having been conquered, but all the tragic circumstances that human beings face, such as mortality in general.

Yet it is such a beautiful day and the sun is shining and fall is in the air, can't we have a Sunday when we don't talk about the world's pain, past and present? Anyway, you have permission to feel good on this beautiful day.

Remember that before there was a bible, people had to deal with the affects of all this mortality, and of having lost everything, without the bible's grand stories about Jesus, about his preaching and teaching and the miracles he performed, about the Cross and Easter; and even the written accounts of the Exodus and the stories of Joseph and his brothers, and the golden age of David's reign, would not have been widely known.

One can think of the Old Testament as a conversation, they tried many answers to the question of their pain, and several answers are reflected in biblical texts:

1 - They blamed themselves and their unfaithfulness. They screamed, "repent," from the top of their lungs. And it is not hard to blame them, because they were, like us, not always faithful.

2 - They blamed their enemies, especially the one's that conquered them. They called them out for godlessness and greed, for power lust and love of violence, and for their abject refusal to obey the commands of the Lord. They asked for deliverance time and again and sometimes viciously called for their destruction. One cannot blame them because their neighbors were in fact greedy and godless and power hungry, and violent.

3 - They even took issue with God, like in the Book of Job, where Job defends himself against his detractors and claims his innocence and wonders aloud why God isn't keeping up the divine end of the deal.

"Is there no balm in Gilead," Jeremiah asks, "Is there no physician there?"

In addition to the healthy venting that is contained in these texts, the bible listens to every voice without necessarily judging them. They each represent part of the truth but not all of it. The bible pushes us deeper in on the hope of better discoveries and explanations.

One such explanation involves a challenge to God. They are God's people after all, and when they are conquered and humiliated, it is a bad reflection on God's character. Allowing God's people to suffer is bad public relations on God's part;

"Help us, O God our Savior, *for the glory of your name*. Deliver us and forgive our sin, *for your namesake*."

It seems like a bold prayer, desperate bargaining with God. It is a way of arguing with God about their pain by saying, if God will not protect them from their enemies for their sakes, out of empathy and compassion for their plight, then perhaps God might rescue them for God's own sake, and for the sake of God's reputation in the world.

I am reminded of Uncle Max from the Sound of Music. "It wouldn't do me any harm either." From time-to-time in the psalms and in the prophets, one sees this line of reasoning. When we look at the church in the world today, we see all kinds of distortions and contradictions; there are clergy sex scandals in every branch of the faith; and there are endless divisions and constant infighting. There is the sanctioning of war and violence; there is excess and greed and arrogance and pride.

No sooner does some new movement of the Spirit arrive to cleanse and make whole than it becomes corrupted by the vices of those who lead it. One very much wonders why God doesn't come along in some vast sweep of history and clean it all up just to save his good name.

But God is apparently not concerned primarily with God's own reputation. God works within our hearts and in our communities and in the world itself to bring about the pure-heartedness and the goodness (righteousness is one of the biblical words) that in our best moments we long for and seek.

Furthermore, apparently God does not feel the same way about their enemies as they do, wanting them to be destroyed. In the beginning of it all God says very plainly that it was for the sake of the world, that Israel was called to be God's people.

And remember the cross of Christ, which is God's answer to the problem of the world, taking upon himself the burden of the world's life and redeeming it through a divine sacrifice, making reconciliation possible, forgiveness a reality, making meaning, wholeness, joy and peace a universal experience of the faithful.

The prayer is prayed with mixed motives. One motive is selfish, it wouldn't do us any harm either. But we are moved by God's gracious action to the place where there is less self in the prayer, and a greater concern for the world's people, even those we consider enemies; until we at last are able to pray, "O God, help us," and it is alone for God's glory that we are concerned. When that happens, we are able to agree with the apostle Paul when he says,

"I urge . . . that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people . . . that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

It is God's will for us, it is our deep desire, for our sakes, for the world's sake, and for the glory of God's name