

# Prayer in Time of Affliction

*Book of Psalms*

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Let's take our Bibles and look together in Psalm 79. Last time, we considered together the first part of this Psalm and I entitled it "The Church Embattled," but I would like us to come back now and read it one more time and consider how the Lord teaches us to pray in times of affliction. Certainly, we have here a model prayer given in Psalm 79 that, I believe, typifies how our Lord, himself, would pray. We're not going to find any prayer in Scripture that would not be in accord with how our Lord would have taught his disciples to pray and would have us to pray in our time of need.

Let's read together, here, in Psalm 79 and these 13 verses and then I pray the Lord will direct our thoughts together in these few moments. Psalm 79, a Psalm of Asaph.

"O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them. We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place. O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed. Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die; and render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord. So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations."

Let's have a word of prayer.

*Most gracious heavenly Father, as we take up your Word once again today, I pray for your Spirit to be our teacher and to direct our thoughts and hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray, dear Father, that you would not leave us to our own understanding of this your Word, but that you would grant us that true interpretation, that one that directs our hearts to your blessed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray that in all things he would be exalted in our midst today as we meet together and I'm thankful for each one that you have purposed to be with us and pray for your blessing in the hearing of your Word. We give you the praise and the glory in our dear Savior's name. Amen.*

We considered together last time primarily the first four verses of this chapter and seen a church besieged. I believe the lesson that we can take away from Psalm 79:1-4 is that there are no surprises with God, that when the enemy overruns his people, overtakes his church, that it is not taking God by surprise. It might take us by surprise, but it doesn't take the Lord by surprise. And we could talk about the many ways and reasons that God would ordain that there be times when the enemy would have the victory and seemingly overcome his church and his people for a season.

But what I want us to consider here, particularly from verse 5 on down to the end of the chapter is how it is that we, the Lord's people, are to pray and I would be the first to confess to you that even as Paul wrote there in Romans 8, "we know not how to pray as we ought," and that it takes the Spirit of God to take the prayers of our heart, the groanings which cannot be uttered, and to bring them to the Lord and, certainly in prayer, it's not the words necessarily that we formulate. I believe that these words are written for our encouragement and our instruction but true prayer is a cry of a needy soul from the heart. It is the Spirit of God taking the cry of a needy sinner and bringing it to God and you can see the urgency that is set forth here in Psalm 79 even with verse 5, "How long, LORD?"

Now, that is a confession that it is the Lord who determines the length of these things, otherwise, why would you ever pray how long? I know that many times people pray thinking that God will answer and bring immediate relief, but he's the one that determines the length and time and season of these tribulations, of these troubles. The notion that somehow if we're the Lord's we're going to be free from trouble in this world, is false. Even the Lord told his disciples before he went to the cross. He said, "In the world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." It doesn't mean that we're of good cheer in the sense of enjoying the persecution or affliction; there is no trial that the trial itself is joyous. In fact, if somebody is just giddy and the more they're smacked the happier they get, you've got to think that that person is crazy; there is something wrong with them.

True trials, particularly ones that the Lord is pleased to direct toward his people and such a trial we see here in Psalm 79, are designed to: 1. wean us of any self-confidence because without them, we would certainly become presumptuous in our sin; but 2. to bring us low and show us again and again our need of the Lord Jesus Christ and the work

that he has accomplished for sinners such as we are; but 3. in those trials, it is designed to cause us to see the power and glory of God in his deliverance and in his keeping of everyone that the Son has redeemed. And so, even this in verse 5, "How long, LORD?" I know there is that criticism that if we say that God is sovereign in all things and he is, then why pray? Well, it's because he is sovereign that we do pray; it is because he is sovereign that we do address him. I can't imagine praying to a God who can't help you anyway or where the answer is, "Look, I've given you everything you need, just go use it." Now, that's not the God of Scripture. You can see here in verse 5, the word "LORD," that's the word Jehovah and the King James translators were very careful in each case to put it in all caps where it was the Lord in the sense of Jehovah. This is the great I AM; this is the name that when Moses asked, "Who should I say has sent me?" "Tell them that I AM has sent me." So, this is what we find here clearly set forth in verse 5, "How long, LORD?" If he were not Lord, if he were not the sovereign, then he would not even be worthy of our prayers but the fact that he is Lord, he is sovereign, therefore, those prayers are addressed unto him.

Here in Psalm 79:5, the question is "wilt thou be angry for ever?" Now, there's a difference in Scripture between God's anger and God's wrath and some might question that, but wrath is that eternal condemnation or judgment that he has purposed upon the reprobates, upon those for whom Christ did not pay the debt. But I can tell you with all surety that there are times where, even as a father, you might chasten your children in anger but that doesn't mean you denounce them as your children, that doesn't mean that you cast them off and say, "You're no longer my child." The anger has a purpose; the anger has a direction and that is correction and, certainly, this is the question that is asked here. There is not an ounce of wrath.

When God is pleased to chasten one of his children, there is not an ounce of wrath in that chastening. Now, if you ask a kid who is being chastened by his parents, "Well, what do you think?" "They were really mad," or, "They were angry," and they try to find fault with that but I don't know of a genuine father that's ever, because of the disobedience of that child, is going to say to that child, "You're no longer my child." No, the purpose of the anger is really displeasure and it's a jealousy. You can see there in verse 5 of Psalm 79, "Shall thy jealousy burn like fire?" Is God a jealous God? Well, he's jealous of his honor; he's jealous of his glory; he's jealous of his Son. See, there's a good jealousy and then there is an evil jealousy. With God, the jealousy is always good, it always has to do with his glory and honor.

And so, you can see the distinction here in verse 5, "Wilt thou be angry for ever?" angry in a sense of chastening. But in verse 6, if you're going to pour out your wrath and, here again, we take the Scripture for what it says. There is a debate today of whether there really is even a judgment, whether hell exists. You read all kinds of literature on it; people trying to skirt around it that for them, a loving God would never create creatures to send them to hell. Well, here is a prayer that we find in Scripture and, therefore, a scriptural prayer where the inspired Word says, "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee." Is there a world out there that is perishing? Yes. Is there a judgment that awaits those who die outside of the Lord Jesus Christ? Absolutely and it is

for such that this prayer is made. And here is where I mentioned in the introduction, that we really have here a model prayer. Not only of how the Lord's people are to pray in times of need and affliction, but how our Lord Jesus Christ, himself, would have prayed.

If you go over to John 17, look with me. John 17 is really the Lord's Prayer. I know people say the Lord's prayer is the one that says, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, they will be done," but that was a prayer that he taught his disciples to pray, although he would have also prayed it, but here in John 17, we have the Lord's prayer. This is the prayer that he prayed on the eve of going to the cross and if you wonder what was on our Lord's mind? What would he have been praying there in the Garden? We don't have to speculate. There are some other writers that call John 17 the "High Priestly Prayer" and that it is. This is the prayer of Christ to the High Priest on behalf of that people for whom he was about to shed his blood and lay down his life and offer that blood up to God the Father on behalf of their sins.

So, the question is: did he pray for everybody? There are some that would argue we would need to pray for everybody and we need to pray that everybody will be saved. Well, if that were the case, it would be contrary to even what we're reading right here. We'd have to strike out of our Bibles, Psalm 79 and verse 6 then, because certainly Psalm 79:6 is not praying for the salvation of these but it says, "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name."

So, there is a distinction, even in how we're to pray for people, for sinners. There is a distinction even in how our Lord prayed as we find here in John 17. Notice in verse 6, the Lord said, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." Now, here is the key verse, in verse 9 which, I believe, parallels Psalm 79:6. And this Psalm that we're studying, who is it that the Psalmist is addressing these prayers for? It's for the Lord's church; it's for his people; it's for the redeemed. And all others, he prays that the wrath of God be poured upon them, just like here in verse 9 of John 17, he said, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them."

You know, but for the grace of God, I should have been one of those that the Lord passed by and so should you. So if, in God's mercy and grace, he purposed to save such sinners as we are, know that it is all by his grace and it is a distinctive grace, it is a grace which cost the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, his life. He laid down his life as the substitute, as a great Shepherd for sinners. It's not that any of us are better than the world. In fact, if you are honest and evaluate your own heart even as the Lord time to time by his Spirit causes you to really see what you are by nature, you have to say, "I'm no different than anybody out there." But for the grace of God.

So, this is not something that we pridefully declare, that we feel like, somehow, “I’m better than anybody else. No, I should have been the object of that wrath. I should have been that one that the Lord utterly cast into hell. But if he hasn’t, it’s because he purposed to save me. He gave me to his Son even before I knew him and Christ paid my debt.” You see, the Scriptures say that it was not while we were yet righteous Christ died for us, but while we were yet sinners, while we were yet enemies, that’s our nature and Christ died. That’s the only thing that makes a difference between one of the world and one of the Lord’s. It’s not our nature, it’s not who we are, it’s the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s the only difference that there was between Peter and Judas. Sit down and evaluate what was the difference between Peter denying the Lord and Judas denying the Lord? They both denied the Lord. In fact, with Peter around that fire, it says he did it with cursing. When they persisted, “You’re that one. We know.” He swore. He did everything he could to align himself against the Lord. You say, “Well, why would God save Peter then and not Judas?” Well, the Lord told Peter why, he said, “Satan has desired to sift you like wheat.” But he said, “I have prayed for you that your faith fail not and when you’re converted,” he said, “go and encourage the brethren.” That’s the only reason. That’s the only difference between a Peter and a Judas, it’s because of the Lord’s mercies.

So, a distinctive grace here, coming back to Psalm 79 and, again, what we’re looking at here is how it is that we’re taught to pray in time of affliction. Yes, affliction there will be. God has purposed even persecution against his church and we’re to expect it in this world. Beware of aligning yourself or wanting to compromise any truth with regard to Scripture that would somehow bring the favor of the world. We’re not to do that. The most important favor that any sinner could have is to be accepted in the Beloved, in the Lord Jesus Christ, have God’s favor. I think about Joseph even, where his brothers hated him because his father favored him and yet that didn’t deter Joseph from that favor that the father placed upon him and that’s the way we’re to live in this world as well.

So, “Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen,” the reality that there is that wrath. You know, if we’re saved, it’s not that we’ve dodged a bullet like the world says, and it’s not that God lowered his standard in order to save us. No, we had to be punished; we had to endure this wrath just like the rest of the world. You say, “Well, where did that happen?” It’s like Noah in the ark. Noah was not spared from the judgment of the world, he went through the exact same judgment, he and his family, as the world did. That rain, that water that pelted down, the floods that erupted up from underneath, that entire flood, the world went through. Noah and his family included. You say, “Well, how was Noah saved?” God put him in an ark. It was the ark that bore that flood; the ark bore the judgment. That’s a picture of Christ. It’s not that we have dodged a bullet and so we’re saved because God somehow now has lowered his standard. No, he’s a just God and he cannot lower his standard in order to save a sinner and that’s why the Scriptures say, “He spared not his Son but delivered him up that he might truly give us all things.”

See, it’s in the Son, it’s that wrath poured out upon the Son, it’s him being the substitute for the sinner, that is our salvation. That’s it. You hear testimonials today from different people that will stand up and say, “Well, six years ago, I was saved.” Really? So, what happened that six years ago you were saved? “Well, I did this. I walked an aisle, said a

prayer, finally realized I needed to turn around my life and so, you know, I went to this meeting and the preacher preached a message that got to my heart and .....

Well, you know what? That's a salvation that is built on sinking sand. If you were to ask me, "Ken, when were you saved?" I would say it was 2,000 years ago when God spared not his Son but delivered him up for this wretch and I wasn't even around then. I didn't even know it, but in time he brought me to see what I was and caused me to look outside myself to him, that that's where my salvation is. It's not in a profession, it's not in raising a hand or bowing a head or walking an aisle like you hear so many talking about today. If that were the case, the poor thief on the cross, he couldn't move. His hands were tied and he couldn't raise a hand. His feet were nailed, he couldn't walk an aisle.

And he, right along with that other thief, right up to the end, cursed Christ is what the gospels say. He cursed him right along with the other and then suddenly, there was a change. Where did that change come from? It was the Spirit of God and it caused him to see that his need was as great as any and he said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." That's an amazing statement right there. Here's a man dying on a cross and what did he see to see that this man that was dying had a Kingdom and to be remembered when he comes in that Kingdom. The Lord said to him, "Today you'll be with me in Paradise." That's based upon the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. What made the difference between that thief and the other? They both were just as evil, one as the other. It was the one in the middle, it was the Lord who interposed his precious blood and thereby that thief was saved.

Alright, so come back here to Psalm 79, there is a lot here. This is where you can see how the Lord uses affliction to humble and to bring low, just as I said earlier, because in verses 8 and 9, there is here in the thought of the writer, that truth that we're no better than anybody. "O remember not against us former iniquities." You see, this is where the grace of God humbles. It doesn't make us proud and boastful. It brings us low. It's like David said there in Psalm 130, "Lord, if you should mark iniquities, who could stand?" And so, Remember not against us former iniquities let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low."

That's what the grace of God does, it brings us low at Christ's feet. Look at every sinner that God has ever saved, he's isolated them out from the masses. You see, today there is a salvation being preached in the masses, "Let's see how many we can get to come forward. Let's see how many we can get to make the decision. Let's see how many we can get to make profession and let's get them into some classes. Now that they have believed, let's figure out how we can get them to walk the walk and talk the talk." That would be kind of like a funeral home director standing up cadavers and getting this one adjusted and then turning around and trying to get this one adjusted and all of a sudden, this one starts to fall. That's what preachers are doing in congregations today; they're getting people in that are dead men walking. There's never been a work of grace done in their heart. There's never been this cry that we're reading here where the sinner has been brought low to see their need and their sin and to cry unto the Lord for mercy. You see, that's the cry here, "Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us." Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve, mercy is God withholding from us what we do deserve. It's a

mercy that he does not cast us into hell. And so, “Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us.” Prevent us in the sense of keep us. Keep us from going the way we should go “for we are brought very low.” That’s what the grace of God does, brings us low and causes us to cry unto him.

Notice verse 9, “Help us, O God of our salvation.” What it’s confessing there is that there is not salvation in any other but in God. Salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end. This is, certainly, the God of Scripture that he has chosen those he will save and Israel is a picture of that in the Old Testament. He chose that nation out of all others, purposed to show his favor and bring his Son through there. That’s a picture of his church, of a people, of sinners from every tribe, nation and tongue that he’s been pleased to give to his Son. And he it is that is the God of their salvation. Notice in verse 9, “for the glory of thy name.” That’s the one thing that is like fingernails on a chalkboard, when you hear people today professing to be Christian and all of their testimony is I, me, I. There is no glory there. If God is spoken of almost as a footnote, it’s like one lady some years ago that wanted me to baptize her and as I sat down with her to talk to her about why it is she wanted to be baptized and asking her what it was that she felt the Lord had done in her heart. For 15 minutes she talked on and on about, “I have come to a point where I realized that I needed to turn over a new leaf and so I started to come to church and I really want to start making things right and I…” for 15 minutes. I was silently listening and when she paused I said, “Let me just ask you a question: what does Christ have to do with all of this?” And, you know, her response was, “Oh, yes, him too.”

That is a flippant response. It exposes the heart because all the deadness can do is reap deadness. Where there is life, that life glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ and that’s what we see here. “O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy,” see the direction, “thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name.” And notice here the recognized need for a sacrifice for sin. Faith, God-given faith will always be directed to Christ and him crucified. That’s what we see here. “And deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name’s sake.” It’s not even for my sake. Here, again, we see preachers trying to scare people into a decision, “You don’t want to go to hell, do you? Think about what it would be to live in hell. Think about what that punishment might be,” and so they get people making decisions based upon their comfort. It’s a fire insurance. That’s not salvation.

Here it’s a declaration that “Lord, if you should save me, if you should be pleased to purge away my sins, let it be for your name’s sake.” Otherwise, it’s not salvation and that’s really why God saves. It’s not to do us a favor, but it’s to honor his name. Do you realize that even before Adam fell, God had already purposed salvation for sinners? And why did he do it? To honor his Son. His Son was there from eternity as that Lamb, that Savior. And what would a Savior be without sinners to save? And, therefore, he chose. You see, that’s hard for us to believe, that that would be much of a gift but he actually chose sinners to give them to his Son and his Son was well-pleased.

The book of Hebrews says, “Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised the shame, sat down at the right hand of majesty.” The joy. You talk about

unconditional love, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die,” is what the Scriptures say, “and yet while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us.” That’s an amazing thing when you consider it. But all that “for thy name’s sake,” for his sake.

“Wherefore should the heathen say,” verse 10, “Where is their God?” Will they say that? You know it. I’ll tell you this: if you believe the popular message of salvation that’s being preached, you’re going to be popular. Just drive around and look at the parking lots, even at this hour. There are big monuments and parking lots full, people going to be entertained and to be told something good. It’s like one popular preacher said when the news asked him why he never preached on sin. He said, “Well, why would I do that? Why would I want to talk about anything negative?” You know, it’s all positive thinking but that’s the way of the world.

But when you, by God’s grace, identify with the message that I’m teaching you. Just look around, why is this building not full? Why is this corner not filled? Not for lack of space and it’s not for hiding it. Every Sunday morning at 9 o’clock, KWKH radio broadcast goes out. Not only here in Shreveport but across the world and Sermon Audio. I just sent out the report this morning. Some 33,000 messages downloaded from this pulpit, somewhere out there in the world. But it’s the Lord directing it. It’s not like we’ve got something we’re going to hide here and we don’t want the world to know about it. No, this is a message that is to be declared to the world. Sow the seed, but it’s the Lord who will draw those sinners to come here and rejoice in it. But I will tell you this, as soon as affliction comes, and you know this from your family, from your friends and acquaintances. Those that know that you are different based upon how the Lord has taught you, whenever an affliction comes, whenever trouble comes, whenever you fall. You see, one of theirs can fall and they’ll say, “Ah well, there’s forgiveness with the Lord.” You fall and they will hold it against you forever because they hate your God.

And that’s what this verse says, “Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?” Here’s the answer, “let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed.” In other words, “vengeance is mine saith the Lord.” We don’t have to worry about what people are saying. We shouldn’t worry about it. “What is that to thee?” is what the Lord said to his disciples when they asked about how long John would live. “What is that to thee? Follow me.”

And so, here’s the prayer, “Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee.” Much of what’s called prayer, dear friends, isn’t. It’s so formal today, “Would you like to bow your heads and let’s say a prayer.” I’ll tell you, a true prayer is what is described here in verse 11, “Let the sighing of the prisoner.” It’s that sighing unto the Lord where we’re completely emptied of ourselves and where his Spirit causes us to have no other help or hope but in Christ, the Redeemer. Just “as a prisoner,” talk about being bound by affliction or trouble in this world. That’s all we can expect but let that sighing “come before thee according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die.” Appointed to die by men and I love that and the Lord used that writer some years ago, I can’t even tell you who originally said it, but the thought that we are immortal in this world until such time as God has purposed to take us. I don’t care if a doctor even



tells you you've got six months to live. That doctor doesn't know. All he knows is that might be the pattern but if the Lord will, we'll do this or do that.

But he says, "Render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord." Who do we pray for? I don't know who is the Lord's and who isn't. I don't know for whom he paid the debt and who he didn't but I can pray that he would be pleased to save those for whom he shed his blood. But for all others, "render unto them sevenfold wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord. So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture." You see, that's a distinctive group. The Lord is the great Shepherd; he knows his sheep; he lays down his life for his sheep; he knows his people and he leads them and keeps them. He saved them by his shed blood and his righteousness and they "will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations."

To me, that's a sign of life when a sinner has been so taught of the Lord that come what may, the glory belongs unto the Lord and the honor belongs to him, the praise belongs to him, the thankfulness belongs unto him and truly I pray the Lord would give us such a heart.