

Teach Them the Hard Way

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Bible Verse: Psalm 83
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Well, thank you for being with us tonight. We're so glad to have you joining us over the live stream as well. Our text for this evening is Psalm 83 and I'd invite you to turn there. I'll read it as we begin and then we'll backtrack to some of the Old Testament to lay the foundation for our exposition of it this evening. Next week, we'll have a time around God's word that is centered more specifically on the Incarnation, tonight I wanted to finish Psalm 83 and be able to move on to other things after the first of the year.

Psalm 83, as we continue our verse by verse, Psalm by Psalm exposition of the Psalter here at Truth Community Church.

1 A Song, a Psalm of Asaph. O God, do not remain quiet; Do not be silent and, O God, do not be still. 2 For behold, Your enemies make an uproar, And those who hate You have exalted themselves. 3 They make shrewd plans against Your people, And conspire together against Your treasured ones. 4 They have said, "Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, That the name of Israel be remembered no more." 5 For they have conspired together with one mind; Against You they make a covenant: 6 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites; 7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; 8 Assyria also has joined with them; They have become a help to the children of Lot. Selah. 9 Deal with them as with Midian, As with Sisera and Jabin at the torrent of Kishon, 10 Who were destroyed at En-dor, Who became as dung for the ground. 11 Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb And all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, 12 Who said, "Let us possess for ourselves The pastures of God." 13 O my God, make them like the whirling dust, Like chaff before the wind. 14 Like fire that burns the forest And like a flame that sets the mountains on fire, 15 So pursue them with Your tempest And terrify them with Your storm. 16 Fill their faces with dishonor, That they may seek Your name, O LORD. 17 Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever, And let them be humiliated and perish, 18 That they may know that You alone, whose name is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth.

You know, it is a bad place to be to be in opposition to the God of the Bible. It is a dangerous place to be to be in the position of being one of his enemies and we were all born as natural enemies to God, we were all born in hostility toward him, Romans 8 says that the mind of the flesh is in hostility toward God and we were all in that condition, and so it is very fitting, in a way, for us to reach Psalm 83 in the middle of the Christmas season and to just preface what we have to say about Psalm 83 with the recognition of the great blessing that we have as believers in Christ; that God has changed us from enemies into his friends. Jesus said that he considers us friends in John 15 and that is a blessed place for us to be, but we should never take for granted, we should never overlook the fact that God will deal with his enemies and he will deal with those who are settled in their hostility toward his people because he's a defender of his people, he's a shepherd to his people. He is the one who is a divine warrior on behalf of his people. So as we keep those things in mind, we can come to Psalm 83 with a sense of, again, the magnitude of the theme that is before us.

Psalm 83 is like many of the other Psalms in the great themes that it brings forth to our mind and the great principles that come forward. These are not mere devotional thoughts to help us through a day, this gives us a sense of how the universe works, how God operates and what God does to defend his people. Basically what you have here is the Psalmist reminding God of things that he has done in the past and calling him to exercise that same power against his enemies for the deliverance of his people and ultimately for the glory of his own name, and the Psalmist is consumed with the glory of God as he goes and we'll see that as we go along.

As you read this Psalm in the context of the Old Testament, it's necessary to remember because there are many references to Israeli history in the Psalm, that enemies threatened the Jews throughout their history and in this Psalm in particular, he alludes to some episodes in the book of Judges and I invite you to turn back to the book of Judges for just a few moments to remember that there was this period of time where there were cycles of despair and oppression before God raised up deliverance for his people. He was disciplining them for their sin and yet when they cried out to him in the midst of their oppression, he would act and he would deliver them.

I want to just give you a couple of background passages here that come up as we go to Psalm 83 in a few moments. In Judges 4, the first three verses here, we read the account that, "the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years." So Israel was under oppression from a military force that was beyond their strength and this oppression lasted severely for 20 years, it tells us.

Later on, we'll look at God's deliverance to them but in keeping with the thought that enemies have threatened Jews throughout their history, it came about again in the book of Judges that they were again under assault in Judges 6. Turn over to verse 1 with me. Judges 6:1, "Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the

LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD."

Now as you read through the book of Judges, you realize that God delivered them from those oppressors. He repeatedly relented from the discipline that he had brought on them when they cried out to him in repentance and he gave them deliverance. Barak and Deborah overcame Jabin and Sisera in Judges 4 and 5. A woman drove a spike through Sisera's head and Israel was delivered. Gideon, on the Midianite challenge, Gideon defeated the Midianites with a mere 300 men armed with trumpets, jars and torches in Judges 7. He also defeated Oreb and Zeeb in Judges 7:25, and Zebah and Zalmunna in Judges 8. Without going into all of the details of that, we did a survey of Judges a few years ago, you could look for those messages online if you were interested, without going into the details of it, it's just important to remember that in actual time and space history Israel was brought low by those who oppressed them and in actual time and space history, they cried out to God as a historical matter, these aren't fables of which we speak, this isn't a book of mythology, this is real actual history of which we read, and God raised up deliverers for them who defeated powers that were greater than them with small numbers, at the hands of women even in the book of Judges, and provided deliverance for them so that they were free to serve God free from their oppression, free to enjoy the fruit of the land, free from the dominating effects of their enemies.

Now all of that history will come back to us as we make our way through Psalm 83 but that little bit of history from the book of Judges informs the background of tonight's Psalm. He's going to look to the past to remind God, as it were, of what he had done to deliver them, and what he's doing is, he is citing that prior deliverance as the grounds upon which God should answer his prayers for deliverance in the present, and we see that the importance of understanding the nature of biblical history, understanding and remembering what God has done in the past becomes the ground for faith in the present. We look to the past and we see the mighty acts of God, we see his kindness toward his people, and though we're in different circumstances today, we reason in this manner, we say, "God, you have done this in the past and you haven't changed. Your love for your people is the same. Your power to deliver is the same. So here in our present affliction, we ask you to do for us now what you did for your people in the past. Bring them deliverance from circumstances over which we have no control Help us in the midst of our sorrow, in the midst of our affliction, and show mercy to us as you have done for your people in the past."

Now as I usually do, I think, as we go through the Psalms, it's inevitable when you talk about principles like this from the Psalms and you speak about them here in the post-cross era as now we think about these things in light of the cross and in light of the even greater work that God has done to deliver his people, we should always have it in our minds as Christian believers that God has manifested in a perfect, in a great, in a supernatural, in an undeniable way the fact that he is favorably disposed to his people. There is no other explanation for the cross of Jesus Christ, that while we were helpless Christ died for us; while we were yet enemies God acted to deliver us, not in sending mere human deliverers, he came himself in the person of Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins, to deliver us from our archenemy, the devil, to deliver us from our ultimate doom in hell which was our rightful portion for our sin.

Beloved, that changes the whole way that you think as a Christian. It changes the way that you think about your present difficulties, afflictions and trials and sorrows, because when you remember those things, when you look back at biblical history, you look back at what Christ has done for you, you should start to repeatedly have framed in your mind, "When I come to God asking for help, He is favorably disposed to me. Even though I may be walking through a long valley, a long dark valley, I remember the cross of Jesus Christ and I remember how God acted in my favor, God acted on my behalf. Christ came as my Champion Deliverer in a way that I didn't deserve. And when I was alienated and hostile to God and dead in my sins, Christ acted to save me." Well, now in the logic of Romans 8, how much more then if I come to him as his child having been redeemed by the blood of Christ, how much more can I expect a sympathetic reception when I come to him and bear out my woe before him? You see, the logic of these things is compelling, the logic is undeniable. There is a spiritual reality upon which all of these things are based that should inform you in your prayers to pray with confidence, not with desperation; to have a sense that takes off the sharpest edge of your grief and despair; and to realize that no matter what this feels like, I look back at past history, I look to my Lord Jesus Christ and I see one who is sympathetic to me and that I have a brother, I have a High Priest in heaven who represents me to God and the Father accepts me because he accepts his own beloved Son and I am found in him. Those things, beloved, will revolutionize the way that you walk through life if you just preach them to yourself and if you will rehearse them in your mind again and again and again.

So as we go through Psalm 83 and we see how the Psalmist is praying in the midst of his affliction, we should have it settled in our mind, it should be clear in our minds that we are in an even better position than the Psalmist was when he was praying this way because what he knew in the shadows, what he knew in the Old Testament economy we now know in the fullness of the light of the revelation of the Son of God, that Christ has come, he has revealed God to us in truth and glory, and he has used his full righteousness, his full power, his full prerogative on our behalf. He loved us and he delivered himself, he gave himself for us. How much confidence, then, should we draw near to the throne of grace knowing that we have a sympathetic High Priest like that?

So with those things in mind, we come to Psalm 83 and what he is doing here is he's asking God to intervene against Israel's enemies. And we're not going to take the time to

identify all of the geographic references and all of the peoples of which he speaks, it's enough for us to know that the allusions to geography and history are grounded in prior time and space events and it shows that he was trying to live out his faith, the Psalmist was, in the midst of hostile time and space reality. It doesn't surprise us when we as the people of God encounter opposition, encounter difficulties, encounter hostility toward us. This has been the lot of the people of God from the beginning. You know, look at what happened to Abel. Cain, his brother, killed him. That's just Genesis 4 and the hostility has been ever-present. Throughout biblical times throughout church history there has been hostility against the people of God and we need to remember that. There's a sense in which it's simply a proxy battle, it's a proxy battle indicating the hatred that Satan himself has against Christ, that Satan himself has against God himself, and there is this unseen spiritual battle that goes on beyond the realm of our perception of which Scripture witnesses to us in places like Ephesians 6 or 1 Peter 5, that we have an adversary who is opposed to us, who stirs up enmity against us and makes things difficult for us, and all of that hostility and the difficulties and the trials and the sorrows of life are all designed ultimately to do one thing to us, they are designed to teach us to go to the feet of our Savior dependently, humbly, asking him for grace in the midst of the battle that we might be rid of our human pride, that we might be rid of our self-sufficiency, and learn to trust in him even when circumstances are the most bleak. And the Psalms have taught us that again and again for 82, 83 sessions and they're going to do it for 67 more by the time we're done, to turn to God, to turn to Christ, to turn to his word with confidence that he will deliver us in his time because that's who God is to his people. That's what he does for us. He is a Shepherd to us who loves us, who provides for us, who protects us, who guides us sometimes through the valley of death, yes, but we learn that we are to fear no evil because this one is with us, God with us in the person of Christ, in the person of the indwelling Spirit.

Well, as we go to Psalm 83 then, let's look, first of all, at his prayer for intervention. The prayer for intervention. Asaph opens this Psalm immediately with the nature of his petition. In verse 1 he says this,

1 O God, do not remain quiet; Do not be silent and, O God, do not be still.

There are three petitions there, a threefold emphasis. "God, do not remain quiet. Do not be silent. Do not be still." He's asking God to respond to the crisis that is in front of him and he's saying this, he's saying, "God, do not look passively on our situation. You have the power to intervene, I know that You see this, don't stand by idly while our enemies are afflicting us but instead make Your presence known by intervening on our behalf. Do something here to help us because we are in need of Your action. We are in need of Your help."

He spells that out in verses 2 and 3, look at it with me. He said, don't remain quiet, don't be silent, don't be still,

2 For behold [take note, O God], Your enemies make an uproar, And those who hate You have exalted themselves. 3 They make shrewd plans against Your people, And conspire together against Your treasured ones.

He says, "God, here we are, we're Your people. We're vulnerable now and Your enemies are making shrewd plans against us. They have entered into conspiracies with one another to overthrow us. They are seeking to harm us. They are seeking to eliminate us. And like the waves of the sea, they roar against us, they foam against us."

Look at it there again in verse 2, "Your enemies make an uproar, And those who hate You have exalted themselves." Notice something very crucial in the way that he states the problem before the Lord in this prayer for intervention. He casts them not as "my enemies," not as "our enemies," meaning on a horizontal level they are enemies of Israel, he says, "God, these are Your enemies. God, these people hate You. They're planning against Your people, against Your treasured ones." So the emphasis here is not on our suffering in Psalm 83, he says, "God, they are making a proxy attack on You. These are Your enemies and so all the more reason for You to act because these are people that are acting as Your enemies in the midst of their plans against us." And what he says here exposes a wonderful spiritual reality that when God's people are attacked like that, it's an attack on God himself. To attack the people of God is ultimately to attack the people that God has chosen to identify himself with. So God is not indifferent to his people because ultimately he has saved a people, he has called out a people, Israel in the Old Testament, the church in the New Testament, he has called out this people in order that they might be instruments of his own glory.

So to attack the people of God, to conspire against the people of God is ultimately to conspire against God himself. It is no small matter that they are doing, and Asaph goes on to show that in this context, in the context of Israel, that their goal, the goal of the enemies, is nothing less than total obliteration. They want to vanquish the people of God from the face of the earth. He states it very plainly there in verse 4, he says,

4 They have said, "Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, That the name of Israel be remembered no more."

Their goal was nothing less than, as it were, to take a cloth and simply wipe Israel off of the face of the earth. There are still people wanting to do that today and they just want to do away with the people of God and Asaph says, "God, when they enter into league to do that with each other and plot against us like that, they are plotting against You."

Let's look at this just a little more closely. Verse 2, "They are Your enemies. They hate You, O God." Verse 3, "It's against Your people, against Your treasured ones." Verse 5, "They have conspired together with one mind. Against You they make a covenant. It's not against us, God, ultimately it's You because we're Your chosen people. God, remember the Abrahamic covenant from Genesis 12, how You promised to raise up a nation from the descendants of Abraham, how You made us the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and we're going to be the vessels of Your revelation, the vessels of Your

glory on earth to be a testimony to the nations? God, when they come up against us like that, they're coming up against You. It's against You." You see this emphasized also in verse 12 when they say, "Let us possess for ourselves The pastures of God."

So this is a vertical conflict that's taking place, not simply playing out on a horizontal level, this is a vertical conflict, these nations against God. So what the Psalmist, what his argument is and his prayer is this, he's saying, "God, Your personal cause is at stake here and, therefore, You have every reason, every motivation to respond to my prayer and to act for the sake of Your name, to act for the sake of Your glory because, God, You are the one who raised up Israel and promised to protect us. If they're attacking us, then, and we are Your people, then this is an attack on You, Yourself." And we recognize that God has a say in that, God has a stake in that.

You know, one of the ways that this kind of applies to our thinking in the 21st century is that it's so common and predictable that it becomes pathetic about people who are saying that if the church doesn't change, you know, that the church is going to go out of existence. You know, people are abandoning the church and we people need to change, the church needs to change to accommodate the world or it's going to fall out of existence. Well, beloved, that's not true and there is no reason whatsoever for us to change what we do, to stop preaching the word of God, to stop preaching against sin, to stop calling people to repentance, to stop proclaiming the name of Christ. There's no reason whatsoever to do that because in their efforts to intimidate and marginalize the true people of God, they are bumping up head-to-head with the very promise of Christ himself who said in the Gospel of Matthew, "I will build My church." And you would think that 2,000 years of history of persecution and bloodshed against the church, 2,000 years of martyrdom in different places of the world, and yet the church of Christ still stands and the word of God is still being proclaimed, you'd think that people would learn something about the enduring nature of Christ and his ability to sustain his people and to build his church even in the midst of hostility, but that's all lost on them outside the walls of the church but, beloved, may it never be for us that we lose sight of that, that we lose sight of the promise. Christ will build his church. We're not afraid. There is absolutely no possibility that any power on earth will ever extinguish the church, will ever extinguish the true people of God because they do not have the power to stop Christ from doing that which he said that he himself would do, in which he pledged his name to do. So we realize that when these different kinds of attacks, here a physical attack in Psalm 83, perhaps in our day sometimes a more subtle attack seeking to undermine and to discourage and disillusion the people of God, we come back to who our Christ is and we're renewed and we're undaunted and we stay the course and remind God that it's his cause that is at stake, not our own.

So here in Psalm 83, he's gathering up strength and gathering persuasiveness in his prayer as he speaks to God about the nature of the situation. "God, they're conspiring against You. They've made a covenant against You, therefore, it behooves You to act in the sake of Your own cause." Now, as you continue on reading the petition for intervention, what you see is this, is that it's a very broad conspiracy and the solidarity of these different

nations against Israel makes them a very formidable force as you look at it on a horizontal basis.

Look at verses 6 through 8 and we're not going to spend the time to identify all of these people for the sake of our time here this evening, but we do want to make a general comment about these three verses. Verse 6, they have made a covenant. Who are the "they"? He explains, verse 6,

6 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites; 7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; 8 Assyria also has joined with them [Assyria further to the north]; They have become a help to the children of Lot.

Now for us in the 21st century, those many nations may seem distant and the names seem somewhat irrelevant to us but there's a very interesting feature, a very interesting nature about what he has recited here in these three verses. If you look at a Bible atlas at all and compare it with what's being said here, you'll find that the nations that he has identified make a geographic circle around Israel and with Assyria further to the north and some wandering tribes included in there, you'll find that these hostile countries make a geographic circle around the nation. In other words, what he's saying is, "God, we are surrounded. We are encircled. There is no way of human escape here against these nations. They are too many and they are too strong. We have nowhere to go. We have nowhere to go but up. There is no escape route here. God, we look up to You and ask for Your help."

Now the exact, precise, historical situation in which this Psalm was written is unknown. Some have suggested with a measure of persuasiveness that maybe this dates to the realm and the reign of Jehoshaphat. What you find is, as you compare biblical accounts, you don't find anything where all 10 of these nations and peoples are gathered together at any one time in any one particular narrative. The precise historical situation is unknown. One writer, Derek Kidner, suggests this, "It may be that this is a prayer concerned with something bigger than a single threat and a particular alliance. Rather it's with the perennial aggression of the world against God and his people." In other words, this is an enduring prayer that says, "God, here in the midst of this world, we are continually facing opposition, we are continually vulnerable from threats from those around us."

When you think about the history of the people of the Jews, you realize how true that is. Just walk with me through some biblical history. Pharaoh tried to destroy the Jews at the Red Sea in the book of Exodus. The nation of Assyria, the nation of Babylon invaded them. The northern kingdom, southern kingdom, took them into exile. Herod destroyed the Jewish babies when Christ was an infant. In modern times, Jews have been persecuted. Hitler, you know, destroyed six million of them. And if you look at the end of verse 8, you see the "Selah" there bidding us to pause and consider what's at stake here. Israel is trying to live as a nation in the midst of people that are bent on their total destruction and they have been, just as they were in the book of Judges, just as Abel suffered at the hands of Cain, just as all of these other historical events to which I alluded

have taken place, the Jewish people lived out their position as the people of God in the Old Testament in a realm of hostility, some of it self-inflicted through their own idolatry and faithlessness, but they were the subject of hostility and dealing with people that are bent on their total destruction, people who wanted the beauty and the goodness of the land on which they were and the people that were hostile to them and to their God.

So we stop and we pause and we consider what he's saying here and we realize, if we're entering rightly into the mind of the biblical writer here, we realize that there should be a sense of sympathy with his call to God to intervene. None of us, none of us would relish living life with that kind of continual threat hanging over our heads in a relentless defining nature of our existence people that want us dead and want what we have for themselves. None of us would want that and so we stop and we consider that, we realize how deep and profound and hostile the history is and we say, "Do you know what? I understand why he would pray this way. God, help him! God, intervene for Your people! Do something here. Don't stand idly by. They're Your people. They're under threat. It's continual. God, act and help them. God, act and help us."

So we see the prayer for intervention in those first eight verses. Let's move on to the second part of the Psalm here and look at the pattern for intervention. The pattern for intervention. In this section that's coming up here in verses 9 through 12, the Psalmist reminds God of something. As he prays, he tells God, "I am only asking You to do that which You have already done in the past. I'm not asking for anything extraordinary here. I'm not asking for anything untoward here. I'm only asking you according to the pattern that You Yourself have shown in helping Your people in the past." It's a very powerful prayer. It's a powerful way to persuade God in prayer to say, "God, what I'm asking for is perfectly consistent with what You have done Yourself in the past."

Look at verses 9 through 11 and now our little journey to the book of Judges at the start will pay off for us. He says,

9 Deal with them as with Midian, As with Sisera and Jabin at the torrent of Kishon, 10 Who were destroyed at En-dor, Who became as dung for the ground. 11 Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb And all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, 12 Who said, "Let us possess for ourselves The pastures of God."

Now if you only read Psalm 83 in isolation without any knowledge of Israeli history from prior portions of the Old Testament, that section wouldn't make a whole lot of sense. You could pray over this and ask for illumination all you wanted but it's not going to make any sense until you put it into the context of the book of Judges. What he's saying here, what he's alluding to here, look at what he says in verse 9, "Deal with them as with." Verse 11, "Make their nobles like." He's drawing an analogy, he's drawing a comparison, he's saying, "God, here's the kind of help that I'm asking for. It's what You've done in the past. Our history as a nation provides a precedent for this prayer of mine. You remember back in Judges, Lord, when You delivered Your people from Sisera and his 900 iron chariots? Do You remember, God, how You delivered Your people at the hand of Gideon

and delivered them from great military commanders, You delivered them from those who were too powerful for them, and You intervened and You slew our enemies and You humiliated them and You humbled them and You exercised Your power and exercised Your might in order for the good of Your people? Do You remember all that, God? That's what I'm asking You to do now with our enemies in the present, with what we're facing here today. God, all I'm asking You to do is to act and to save us just like You did for us as a people in the past. So God, there's not reason for You not to act."

And what was the threat? Look at it again with me, verse 12. He says these people in the past said, "Let us possess for ourselves The pastures of God." They wanted to come in and drive us out and to obliterate us as a people. Well, it's the same thing that they're facing now here in Psalm 83. Look at verse 4 with me as he's describing the current enemies when he wrote, "They have said, 'Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, That the name of Israel be remembered no more.'" So, "God, You've done this in the past. This is the same threat and so there is justification for what I am praying based on our past history. Our enemies want our land for themselves but, God, You promised to give this land to us, not to them. God, You made us a nation for Yourself and they want to eliminate us. Isn't it time for You to act? Isn't it time for You to show yourself strong? Isn't it time for You to show mercy to us?"

Now, something that I like to remind us of as time permits and as the occasion comes up, stop for a moment and think, beloved, why does he need to pray this way? Why does he need to pray this? It's because he's in trouble. It's because the people are in trouble. There is a real and genuine specific threat to their existence. Don't you see that sometimes it pleases God to let his people be humbled by trials, humbled by affliction, humbled by difficulties even of a severe existential kind that threaten our very existence? Sometimes God allows us to go through that. It should not cause us to question his love for us. It should not cause us to doubt. It should not cause us to turn from him in anger or despair but rather simply to turn to him and say, "God, my perspective on what I am going through is governed by the eternal realities of the way that You deal with Your people, not the passing nature of my circumstances. The eternal reality of the situation here is this, O God, You have chosen a people for Yourself and You have chosen and included me in the process. I thank You for that, Lord, and the fact that You have done that tells me that there is a certain guarantee that I have a future with You, that my present threat against me is not possibly the end of me. It cannot be the end of me, O God, because You chose me before the foundation of the world. You have eternal purposes that are at work in my life, God, therefore according to that, I ask You to help me in the present. According to Your great purpose, help me and continue the work that You've begun in me, in us as a people, continue it and do what You started. Finish the work that You've begun," so that we express to him our dependence, and yet we express our dependence with a perspective of confidence that understands the past history of what God has done and the future intentions that he has for his people, and the tension and the conflict that we feel in the midst of the battle today is informed by what has happened in the past and what God has revealed will come in the future and, therefore, we live by faith and we do not surrender to our fears, we do not surrender to despair, we do not give in, we do not quit, we do not commit suicide because we intend fully to honor the purpose for which

God laid his hand upon us. We don't check out of life. Maybe it's hard but we persevere, we plow on ahead confident in who God is, what he has done and what he has promised to do. I don't know about you but I want to be around to see the fulfillment of it. Don't you, Matt? And in the midst of the tension, we humbly cry out to him, "God, help. God, do in accordance with Your purpose."

So he's appealed to the past as a basis for God to act in the present and now what's the purpose. Point 3, what's the purpose for this intervention. What is the purpose for this intervention and, beloved – oh, this is so important, this is so important – we need to remind ourselves of the purpose for which we pray, the purpose for which we ask God's intervention in the midst of our difficulties, in the midst of the threats against his people. The purpose, the goal, the aim, the motivation for which we pray is geared toward his glory, is geared toward the honor of his name and the Psalmist makes this all very clear in the final section of Psalm 83. Beloved, this section is intense in its imagery and it is intense in its objectives in what it is asking God to do.

Psalm 83 is a prayer for men. What I mean by that is it is a masculine, strong prayer. It's fine for women to pray it but this is not the effeminate spirituality of so much of what passes for modern-day Christianity. This is a prayer that is anchored in the glory of God and recognizes that he has his purposes in the destruction of the wicked, and it does not shrink back from identifying with the purposes of God as it prays in this manner, always having the ultimate final goal being the glory of God. "God, I would not have Your enemies prevail and Your name injured, Your reputation diminished by the triumph of men who are wicked and who are opposed to You. I would not bear that. I would not have that. So Father, I pray thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. For Your glory. If it benefits me in the process, Lord, that's incidental. The controlling central focus, that which most animates my heart and my prayer, O God, is Your glory. Your glory." And that's what we see as we look quickly at this final section of Psalm 83.

Verse 13, he says,

13 O my God, make them [these enemies of which he has identified in the prior section] like the whirling dust, Like chaff before the wind. 14 Like fire that burns the forest And like a flame that sets the mountains on fire, 15 So pursue them with Your tempest And terrify them with Your storm.

He's using a series of vivid similes asking for thorough conquest. He says, "God, pursue them like the wind pursues a tumbleweed, just spinning down the road with no control, with no strength, with no anchor against the greater force of the wind." We lived in California, we saw that from time to time and you just see these massive apparently really large plants just bouncing down the road in response to the wind, being driven wherever the wind wants to take them. That's the kind of thing he's praying. "Lord, these nations that are gathered up against us, come upon them like a wind and blow them away like a rolling tumbleweed never to be seen again, and let the process of their bouncing away be a manifestation of Your greater strength against their pathetic weakness against Your power. Leave them without root and insecure. Consume them like a wildfire that runs

through the forest," verse 14, "Like fire that burns the forest And like a flame that sets the mountains on fire." Saw that in California too and the massive power these firestorms running through hundreds and even thousands of acres in a short amount of time as the fire just consumes the dry kindling that is all around it in these forests and it just explodes in fire and that which was once on the hillside is reduced to ash in the aftermath of the flame that consumed it. "God, I pray that You would consume them like that. Burn them up. Carry them away. Reduce them to ash. Overcome them like a storm and leave them no avenue of escape." Verse 15, "So pursue them with Your tempest And terrify them with Your storm."

So you have all of these vivid natural, these vivid images from the natural world giving a thoughtful poetic picture to the complete victory that he's calling God to exercise on behalf of his own name. Like I said, this is not a prayer for the fainthearted. This is a manly prayer. This is a prayer that is rooted in a sense of the glory of God, a sense of right and wrong, a sense of eternal perspective that those who settle themselves in opposition to God and his purposes and his people have forfeited their right to exist.

But I want you to see something, beloved, and this is not a Psalm that I would expect the natural man, the man of the world to take any liking to. This is a prayer, a Psalm which many would attack because of the strength of it. You and I aren't in that realm so let me just help you think about it from the right perspective and to see something very critical in our understanding. Psalm 83 here is not written by a man who is preoccupied with a desire for personal revenge. That's not on his mind at all. He is simply zealous for the glory of God and he makes that very plain.

Look at verse 16, he says,

16 Fill their faces with dishonor, That they may seek Your name, O LORD.

"That they would seek Your glory. That they would recognize who You are. I want to see You prevail against them so that Your name would prevail in the estimation of all who see and hear."

Now he's not necessarily asking for their spiritual conversion there in verse 16. Some people see it that way, men that I respect greatly see it that way. You know, he's saying, "That they may seek Your name," he's praying for them ultimately to be saved. Well, maybe, but in context it sure doesn't read that way. It reads more like a plea for forced submission, "That they would bend the knee to You, O God, and that You would bring them down from pride." Why do I see it that way as opposed to this sense of conversion? Well, look at what follows in verse 17. He says,

17 Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever, And let them be humiliated and perish,

That's not quite the view of somebody praying for the salvation of their loved ones. He's praying that they would be brought down from their pride, that they would be humbled before the magnificence of God and forced to confess that the God of Israel is the only true God in all the world and that they were powerless against him. In Philippians 2 kind of language, every knee will bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Every knee is going to bow. We as believers bow voluntarily in worship. A lot more in time will bow in forced submission and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord though they defied him throughout all of their life.

He's praying for these proud, boastful, arrogant nations to be brought down from their pride and ultimately, ultimately, beloved, here's what we need to see in verse 18 as he writes under the influence of the Holy Spirit, as the Holy Spirit guides his words as he penned them some 3,000 years ago or so, the whole point of all of this praying, "God, deliver us for the sake of Your name. God, subdue Your enemies. Drive them away like tumbleweed." What is the point of it all? Verse 18,

18 That they may know that You alone, whose name is Yahweh, Are the Most High over all the earth.

The goal of his prayer, the goal of the vindication, the deliverance, the intervention that he seeks is all summed up in that one great phrase. He is seeking after the glory of God. He is praying, "Soli Deo Gloria, to God alone be the glory, because, God, when You do that, when You answer my prayer like this, You will be glorified and Your holiness and Your faithfulness will be vindicated so that there is no contest, that there is no doubt, that there is no voice raised up against the knowledge of God and the knowledge of His glory. Let everyone see it, Lord. Let it be manifest to all that You are exalted, that You are glorified, that You are alone the one who reigns over all and manifested in this judgment."

Wow. You say, "But does that have a place in New Testament thought? Does this have a place in New Testament Christianity?" Well, turn to Revelation 19. At the end of the age, Christ is going to come and Revelation 19 shows us that he will come as a conquering warrior. Verse 11,

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." 17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out

with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great." 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Beloved, these things teach us that as much as we glory in the forgiveness that Christ has given to us as believers in him and we rest in the salvation that he purchased for us at the cross, God will not be treated as a fool. God will deal with his enemies. God will crush and defeat them in the end. And it teaches us to fear him. It teaches us to revere his glory and the unrepentant will learn the hard way that Jesus Christ is Lord, and in that, even in the destruction of the wicked, God will be glorified as he manifests his ultimate sovereignty over all of his enemies and brings them to the doom that they themselves deserve.

Now for us, we look at that and we say, "This vengeance belongs to God." In the meantime, what he has committed to us, in this meantime in the parenthesis before the coming of that great and awful day, we preach to men, "You need to fear God. You need to come to Christ. You need to be reconciled to Him. There is this coming time of judgment, why don't you flee from it? Why don't you come to Christ for salvation and reconciliation with God before He treads you down with the rest of His enemies? Why don't you seek Him now while there is time, while the offer of Christ is presented to you and He invites you to come voluntarily to be received in love, to bend the knee gladly rather than to have the knee bent for you in judgment?" That's our message. That explains the urgency of preaching the Gospel of Christ. We call men to repent and to be reconciled to God while they can.

Beloved, I have to ask you: have you met Christ now in love and mercy or are you playing games with an appointment where you would meet him in his judgment and wrath?

Let's pray together.

Father, help us ever to seek Your glory, to rest in the assurance of Your ultimate triumph, to preach the Gospel to a lost and guilty world. Thank You for saving us from the judgment that we ourselves deserved, O God. Thank You that we are safe in Christ never to be forgotten, never to be overlooked, that You will keep us all the way through to the end, through final judgment on this earth, through Your coming kingdom into eternity, O

God, we will belong to You and for that we are eternally grateful. Father, protect us and help us as we walk through this earth filled with valleys and filled with tears. Vindicate Your glory as You deal with us, as You protect us, as You provide for us, as You guide us through this life. We look humbly to You and ask that You would be glorified in our lives. For the sake of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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