

Psalm 44

Introduction – Psalm 44, another psalm of lament, is the first corporate complaint and cry for national deliverance in the psalter. The psalm-singer claims that God has abandoned a people, innocent of unconfessed sins or idolatry, to the ravages of the enemy, and has left them on the verge of destruction. As the disciples turned to Jesus during a deadly storm and called on Him to wake up, so this psalm sings, “Awake! Why do you sleep, O LORD?” We are taught in our meditation over this psalm to recall God’s faithful deliverances in the past, His sovereign purposes in the present troubles, and how we are to lament before Him according to His great lovingkindness.

Overview of the Psalm – Think of four movements. First, tell and hear the songs of past deliverances and victory (vv1-8). We heard the stories of our fathers (vv1-4) and we have seen Your great hand at work as well; as soon as You command it, victory is complete (vv5-8). Second: A lament of abandonment without cause; You have cast us off while we have remained faithful to You (vv9-21). Third: The result is that we are slaughtered like sheep for Your sake (v22). Fourth: Arise and redeem us for Your mercies’ sake (vv23-26).

Hear and Tell – Israel was commanded to tell the stories of God’s great power over Pharaoh to set His people free (Deut 6:20-21) and all the stories of God’s deliverances (Psalm 136 for example, with its famous refrain “*For His mercy (hesed) endures forever*” in each verse). We are commanded to hear these stories and to tell them to our children (Eph 6:4). We are to note that it was the strong arm of the LORD that saved us and not ourselves (v3) “*because You favored them.*” Then we should tell stories of other times, nearer to us, where God has saved (v7) and so we are to study church history, remember and be encouraged by how God has delivered His people, His church, over and over, as we pray for present reformation and revival. In any present situation, all it takes is for God to command and we are saved (vv4-5). Spurgeon warns, “*when fathers are tongue-tied religiously with their offspring, need they wonder if their children’s hearts remain sin-tied?*”

Every Christian is himself a story of God’s deliverance according to His good pleasure. It is all according to the free mercy of our God in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:23). Not a one of us has entered into this refuge by the power of our own merit, but by “*Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, because You favored them*” (v3). Tell your story, not only your testimony proper, but stories of God’s lovingkindnesses to you, deliverances upon and over you and yours. Hear other’s stories and be driven to an overflow of thankfulness – “*In God we boast all day long. And praise Your name forever*” (v8).

“But You Have Cast Us Off!” – This is a psalm of triumph if we only read the first 8 verses. But that is not the point of the psalm. It’s all leading up to this lament (vv9-16). The perplexing present is marked by suffering and disgrace. There is a deep disconnect between what he has heard and what he is experiencing now. God has given them over to defeat (vv9-10). They are slaughtered like sheep in a market and sold off at basement prices (vv11-12). They are mocked for trusting in this useless God and the psalmist has no answer (vv13-16).

The order of this psalm is so important. First, the psalmist praises God for unmerited favor and deliverance. Only because He has seen God’s sovereign hand in the blessings can He declare and even blame God for the terrible situations they now find themselves in. God is sovereign in both. You won’t truly lay the blame upon God for the bad things unless you have been regularly laying the responsibility upon God with thanksgiving for the good things.

Having done so, it is possible to see that such evils can come upon a person, a generation, a nation, and yet not necessarily be due to any sin. In this situation, the psalmist argues that while they had remained faithful to the covenant, God had seemingly abandoned them (vv17-21). This was the argument of Job, a righteous man who argued before God that He had brought catastrophe upon him without cause. This was the argument of Jesus in John 6 where He was asked, “*who sinned, this man or his parents*” regarding a man born blind. God has His perfect reasons and they are often unrevealed (Deut 29:29). And so, in this world, it is often the case that thousands, tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of Christians are killed because of their faith or because their faith is in the way of some ruthless enemy (v22).

From Lament to Petition (vv23-26) – God is supposed to be Savior, Protector, a Rock, our Refuge and Strength. Therefore, it is appropriate, in such times when He doesn't appear to be, to cry out to Him to be so. "Awake!" "Arise!" "Arise for our help!" "Do not cast us off forever!" "Why are you sleeping!" "Why do you hide Your face?" "Why do You forget our affliction?" These are all proper petitions, screams, for help. You helped us in the past (according to your lovingkindness). You must help us now (according to your mercy). But you are not helping us, even though we have done nothing to prohibit your helping us. So help us now – "*redeem us for Your mercies' (hesed) sake.*" Even our regular ending "*in Jesus' name*" speaks of this lovingkindness. It is the lovingkindness of God and that alone that has given us access to the throne of grace.

For God's Sake – Killed All Day Long (v22) – Paul quotes this psalm in his great passage on the conquering faith of those in Christ (Rom 8:31-39). The reason it is quoted after asking "*shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword...separate us from the love of God*" is because such tragedies did, do, and will happen to Christians. The tone of Psalm 44 is one of faith and despair. God is asleep. But the tone in Rom 8 is different, and the difference is that Jesus has come and been raised from the dead. We are more than conquerors (v37).

More Than Conquerors – We are more than conquerors because Jesus was more than a conqueror. Paul moves from a failure to be conquered (vv31-36) to a success in conquering (vv37-39). Elsewhere, Paul explains, "*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*" (Phil 1:29). Our union with His Spirit binds us as one body. And our union binds His church, His body, as the instrument by which the gospel is taken to the ends of the earth. It is not just that we are hated because they hated Christ. We are hated because we are Christ in the same way that your body is you. This means that a Christian never suffers outside of Christ, but always as a part of the Messiah's family, society, or body. This is how Christ is reigning in the world – a pattern of humiliation and suffering through His body on His behalf.

But that is not to stifle hope for the evangelization of the world. We are more than conquerors. The blood of the martyrs has always been the seed of the church (which is another reason to know your church history). The devil hates Christians, and the more he stamps them out, the more the church spreads and grows. He and the world can devise all they want – and God laughs them to scorn (Psalm 2). Faithful psalm-singing teaches us that whatever setbacks, persecutions, even temporal defeats, that the church experiences today – all of it is being used by the hand of God to bring forth the conquering victory of the cross and our risen Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 5:10-12).

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