

Series: Psalms

Title: Instruction for our Day

Text: Ps 74: 1-23

Date: Feb 4, 2021

Place: SGBC, NJ

### **Psalm 74: 1: «Maschil of Asaph.»**

Psalm 74 is a Maschil Psalm—a Psalm of instruction—it gives instruction for our day.

**Subject:** Instruction for our Day

Verses 1-11 is a cry of lamentation. Verses 12-17 he remembers God's past works of grace. God's past works give us hope for God's works of grace now and in the future. Throughout the Psalm, especially verses 18-23, is a prayer to God to save his elect by his grace.

**Proposition:** That is the instruction for our day: in the present judgment that God is executing in the earth, he makes his child see our utter helplessness and draws us nearer to God to worship him and ask him to save.

**Divisions:** 1) By making us lament our present state, 2) By bringing us to remember God's past works of grace, 3) by bringing us to ask God to save us

### **LAMENTATION**

**Psalm 74: 1: O God, why hast thou cast *us* off for ever? *why* doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? 2: Remember thy congregation, *which* thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, *which* thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt. 3: Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; *even* all *that* the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. 4: Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns *for* signs. 5: *A man* was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. 6: But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. 7: They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled *by casting down* the dwelling place of thy name to the ground. 8: They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. 9: We see not our signs: *there is* no more any prophet: neither *is there* among us any that knoweth how long. 10: O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? 11: Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck *it* out of thy bosom.**

What is going on the world? What is going on in this nation? What is going on in the visible church? God is bringing his true people to lament our present state to see our need of God.

The true church of God in that day thought this because of God's judgment upon their nation. God's judgment lasted a long time—70 years they were in Babylonian captivity. It was God's judgment upon reprobate Israel. But it caused God's true, elect Israel to suffer and be oppressed.

When we behold our dire state we speak emotionally, using hyperbole. He said, "*O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?*" When God pours out judgment on a nation, his anger waxes hot against the people that are not

his people. But God's people suffer in it. We are apt to exaggerate. But God never casts off his people whom he foreknew—who God foreloved and foreordained to eternal life.

Romans 11: 2: God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 3: Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 4: But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to *the image of* Baal. 5: Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6: And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.

I have heard brethren everywhere say it seems this world has a spell cast over them. What is God doing? It is what God did in the day of the Psalmist and in Paul's day,

Romans 11: 7: What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded. 8: (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;)

Not every church and people who claim to be Christians are God's true church. The visible church is not the church of God's elect, not Mt Zion. The true church is the elect in the midst of the visible church like elect Israel was in the midst of natural Israel.

All sinners are born blind, spiritually dead—even most who claim to be Christians. But God hardens men's hearts by a spirit of slumber so that they can no longer recognize sin and self-righteousness that they once recognized as sin. Therefore, vain religion unites with the sinful world, accepting sins they once opposed. It is the sure end of will-works, legal religion. In the revelation given to the apostle John vain religion is the lesser beast that looks like a lamb and does great works to deceive. But the lesser beast is united with the beast of the reprobate world.

But after that, John saw Christ the Lamb standing on Mt Zion and with him was the exact number of his elect having their Father's name in their foreheads. Though God sends slumber upon the reprobate, God never casts off his people who he foreknew. He everlastingly loves his people freely in Christ. Therefore we shall never be consumed in his wrath. He chose us freely by grace—therefore nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

God is angry with the wicked every day but God is never angry with the sheep of his pasture. The wrath of God abides on those outside of Christ for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And his sheep were deserving of his wrath because we are sinners like all others. But God "has not appointed his elect to wrath; he has appointed us to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:9).

God appointed his own only begotten Son to bear the wrath of his justice for us—Christ said, "I know my sheep and I lay down my life for the sheep." By bearing the just wrath of God in our place, Christ has delivered us from wrath to come. Having justified us by his blood and righteousness, God our Father says to you who believe on his Son, "*Fury is not in me.*" (*Is 27:4*)

The Lord Jesus is our Shepherd and we are the sheep of his pasture. Indeed, the Lord chastens us for our sins. Right now, as God judges the world, we suffer. But God sanctifies it

to the hearts of his child so that we behold his loving chastening correction. He turns us from this world and draws us to Christ. But even in God's chastening there is no anger towards his people: not personally nor in providence

By drawing us to ask God to remember us, God makes us remember that we are his congregation—*"Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt."*

God's elect church is God's congregation. He said, *"Remember, thy congregation."* And we are his purchased possession, *"thy congregation which thou hast purchased of old."* Christ is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He purchased us by his blood over 2000 years ago. We are *the rod of his inheritance*—his peculiar treasure—and he will have his inheritance. His true people is *the Mt Zion in whom Christ dwells*—he has and does and shall dwell in us. Believer God's hand is upon this world to give a spirit of slumber but while God's judgment is *woe to the wicked, it is well to the righteous*.

## THE CAUSE

What do we lament? What has the enemy done? What is the cause of all the trouble we see?—*"Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations; even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary."*

God sent Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who desolated the city of Jerusalem and the temple. Again, God sent the Roman king Titus to destroy Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. In our day God is doing the same. he has been doing it for a long time. Israel suffered for 70 years and we have suffered for longer.

What has God allowed the enemy to do to get us in the shape we are in?—*"Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs."* An ensign is a banner—a flag—it is what the army rallies to in the heat of battle.

Christ crucified is our Banner. Jehovah Nissi, the Lord our Banner. Believers are united by Christ, by his gospel, by his blood, robed in one righteousness, with one inheritance. Christ and his blood is the bond of peace by which the Spirit unites his people.

Ephesians 4: 4: *There is one body [Christ is the Head], and one Spirit [sent by Christ to teach us Christ], even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; [Christ is our Hope] 5: One Lord [Christ our God] one faith [in Christ alone], one baptism, [confessing our death, burial and resurrection in Christ] 6: One God and Father of all, [manifest in Christ our God and everlasting Father] who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

We have one ensign—Christ crucified—he is our gospel, our salvation, our unifier and our hope. But in order to create a following after themselves, men set up another banner: for some it is certain laws like a Sabbath day and tithing. The so-called church of Christ has the banner of baptismal regeneration. "The Freewill Church" has free will as their banner. The banner they set up in place of Christ is the sinner, some work by the sinner. Anti-christ is every sinner who calls himself by Christ's name but gives himself the glory for works only God can do.

2 Thessalonians 2:4: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

He has raised another ensign and the banner is man! The number of the beast is the number of man! So he lamented that men once used their abilities to build the house of God giving God the glory but now they used them to destroy the house of God—*"A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers."* Men used axes to cut down the cedars of Lebanon to build the temple giving God the praise and glory. Now they used the same to destroy the Lord's house. Those God saves rejoice in Christ. But over time men split off for vain reasons and start a new work or a new denomination. The means they once used to build God's house, now they use to destroy it.

Here are some examples, *"They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground."* Once God cast fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, now men imitate the work only God can do. For example, today men claim they make Christ's blood effectual by their decision for Christ. That is man's fire rather than God's fire.

This is the deceitful sinful heart of vain religionists, *"They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long."* The deceitful heart is saying let us destroy Christ's works and replace them with man's works. Therefore, how few and far between are God's true prophets preaching our Banner, Christ and him crucified—we see not our signs. We are in the shape we are in from sinners being lied to and told they are not sinners, that salvation is up to them when they get ready.

But by this judgment and the multitude of vain religionists, God makes us see we are helpless to save ourselves much less put down the enemy of Christ. By this God brings us to call out to God, *"neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? pluck it out of thy bosom."*

## REMEMBRANCE

**Psalm 74: 12: For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. 13: Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. 14: Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. 15: Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers. 16: The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. 17: Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.**

In the midst of God's judgment upon the world, he makes his children remember God's works of old. By this he strengthens our hope in his present works and his works in the future—*"For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth."*

God our Father prepared a kingdom for his people from the foundation of the world. A kingdom has a king. Christ has been our King from everlasting. He was born King of the Jews—his people. He is King now working salvation in the midst of the earth.

Notice, all the works are his works and so they are right now—*"Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of*

*leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness. Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood: thou driedst up mighty rivers."*

Christ divided the Red Sea by his strength. He delivered his people and destroyed Pharaoh and his army. He gave the possessions of Egypt to his people to provide for them. So it is on the cross that Christ delivered his people by his blood, crushed the devil's head, destroyed all our enemies, and Christ has given all things into the hands of his people and continually provides for us.

Christ is the Smitten Rock from which the fountain of water flowed—SO HE IS NOW! Christ dried up the Jordan—his priests held up the ark and the people looked to the Ark and he dried up the river—so we hold up Christ, his people look to Christ, Christ dries up the river of death.

Child of God remember all is Christ's and Christ is doing all—"*The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.*" Knowing the things of nature are his and he controls them all to provide for his people, rest assured, everything in this world is his. He created the wicked for the day of evil. And Christ is controlling everything that comes to pass for his church. That is all I need to know. I do not have to understand the details or see how good can come from it! I know my King is working it all together for the good of those he loves according to his purpose. That is all I need to know.

## **CAST ALL CARE ON OUR LORD**

Notice, the Psalmist has been praying throughout. That is God's purpose. It is to draw us nearer to God. It is to make us cast all our care on Christ. These are all things God promises to do for us. But God will have us to ask him to do it. That is what God is bringing us to do through these present troubles.

**Psalm 74: 18: Remember this, *that the enemy hath reproached, O LORD, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name. 19: O deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever.***

We are his dove. He promises he shall not forget us. But he will have us ask him not to forget us.

**Psalm 74: 20: Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.**

God promises to never forget his covenant promise of grace. But he brings us to ask him to remember his everlasting covenant.

**Psalm 74: 21: O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name.**

We are oppressed, poor and needy. But he promised we shall never be ashamed for trusting him. So God brings us to ask him these things. He LETS his people praise his name.

**Psalm 74: 22: Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily. 23: Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually.**

He alone pleads his cause for his glory. But he will have us ask him to arise and plead his own cause. He brings us to ask him to do for us what God has promised he shall do for us (Eze 36: 37-38).

This is the instruction for our day. In all that God is doing it is to bring us to lament our helpless state. It is to bring us to remember his mighty works of old so that we are strengthened in hope of his mighty works now and in the future. It is to draw us to him, to worship him and cast all our care on him! That is the instruction for our day! Is this what God has wrought in your heart through the trouble? It is what God works in the hearts of his people.

**Amen!**