

Praying when life hurts
5. Plea for the nation - Psalm 80
July 1, 2018 – Pent 6

Big idea: Make us turn to your face so that we might be great again.

God Bless our Native Land

Israel was in trouble. The people needed God to lead them as He had done for them through the desert.

His ark led the people through battles and through a long journey with each of the twelve tribes following in their God-given order. Now the people were in disarray.

Our nation is more divided than it has been at any time since the civil war. Angry voices shout that their way be done! Government servants are treated with loathing and not allowed to dine in certain restaurants or speak in specific venues. Hate has become the temper of the nation.

We sing God bless our native land as we celebrate the fourth of July this week. We remember troops that died for our freedoms. We will have fireworks and picnics to observe the way of life that we share as Americans. Most important we will pray for our nation. Pray that the Lord help us to be strong.

What does that mean? We can pray that things magically get better, but this psalm from a troubled time in Israel's history gives depth to our prayers. This year, let us pray for four things for our nation that only God can provide. Let us pray for the causes of our problems and not just the consequences. Let us ask God to bring the changes that we need.

A prayer for our nation - A. Save us from ourselves v. 2 *before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh.*

Awaken your might; come and save us.

Israel had strayed from its God. In the desert, they had followed the Lord. In the days of David, they had followed the Lord. Solomon had watered down the faith with multiple wives and with all their false temples and gods becoming part of the nation. The call here was for God to lead them as a shepherd. Like sheep having gone astray, they had forgotten their Lord. To save them, God would have to protect them from themselves. He would have to change their hearts so that they were again willing to follow their God as they had in the desert. They were on a path that was leading to destruction. Only God could save them.

Awaken your might, Lord, and save your people. You who dwell between the cherubim in heaven, send down your spirit and create revival among your people. Let us see the errors of our ways so that we might follow you again. We have forgotten your scriptures and developed our own selfish ways.

Like the Israelites, the people of our nation have strayed from God. Prosperity and safety will not be ours as long as the country continues to trash the Bible and its values. We begin our prayer asking that God get people into the word so that they can follow Him. He alone can lead us and save us.

B. Break our hard hearts v.4 *O LORD God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people?*

There are consequences when a nation does not follow God. Israel felt that God had turned against them.

That may be true, but much of what they were facing was merely the consequences of living outside God. God will not be mocked as we expect Him to answer selfish prayers when we don't love Him.

God will bless alternate paths but will allow them to cause their pain and make the nation of Israel the laughingstock of the region. God must let the pain to break His people's hearts as He did in the time of the Judges so that they would return to Him.

It will be the tears and pain of people that will show that the foolishness of all gods being equal or man's wisdom being equal to God. Sometimes it is only when a nation is attacked by its enemies or when financial or natural disaster is eminent that people look to heaven for help.

The hearts of this nation have become stubborn and told God that they don't need Him. The second thing we pray for is that the Lord might break our hearts so that we see His wisdom and His power and are open to His leadership and to following Him instead of trying to get Him to support us.

C. Revive our dying nation v.8 *You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.*

It was God who had taken the ragtag slaves of Egypt and built a great nation. He had taken them and transplanted them like a vine in the ground of Palestine where He fertilized them and let them grow to be secure in the days of David. As the people obeyed the Lord and honored Him, they were strong. Now the vine of Israel had become sickly. The nation that from Egypt to Lebanon and from the Mediterranean to the border of the Euphrates had shrunk and become weak. Only God could restore the grandeur of His people. Only God could give them prosperity and make them healthy again. We think that social programs, education, and scientific discovery will make the nation strong again. How will that change our drug problems, the broken families in a country where every man does what he thinks is right for himself. We spend as if there is no end. We allow people to live for themselves. A revival of our nation will come only when we follow the Lord. He is the one who planted pilgrims and immigrants from around the world. He is the one who molded the democracy that we have and who can rebuild the nation. The third thing we pray for is for God to take control and teach us to depend on Him.

D. We are molested by our enemies v. 13 *Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes?*

The nation is falling, and the enemies of Israel are pushing for more. Having decided to live outside God's protection and mercy, the walls of the nation have broken down. Perhaps this is the start of the Assyrians coming from the north or just the loss of Moab and Edom on the east.

When a nation lives without God, they live without His wisdom and His protection. Those who throw themselves on the mercy of God will find that the Lord will return to them and will rescue them from their enemies just as He did in the days of the Judges. The enemy makes us turn to the Lord.

I thought that America would return to the Lord on September 11. We did for a short time, but we now believe we can protect ourselves and don't need God. As we live outside God's protection as a nation, what will be the next thing that comes our way?

Like the people of the Old Testament, the bad things come to the good and the bad. The difference is that the righteous continue to seek and have God's protection so that He gets them through the challenges. The fourth thing we need to pray for is God's protection when a crisis comes.

The real solution

Dealing with the cause and not the symptoms v. 19 (KJV) *Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.*

Across the nation, there will be prayers today for the Lord to bless this nation and help us with the troubles that have come upon us. We will ask that God magically take away terrorism, the drug overdose problem and a host of local concerns. What we need is prayers about the faith of the nation. The psalmist calls on God to "turn us again (to yourself)" The real problem is not out there. It is that we have forgotten our God and do not put Him first. We must live in the light of His face and let His truth shine in our hearts as we turn from sin and self and follow God all the days of our lives.

We often want the nation saved in our image. The psalmist knew that Israel and all the nations will only have prosperity and safety when her people humble themselves and turn to the Lord for His forgiveness and for the direction of their lives.

We pray about the symptoms of sin asking God to take away sins consequences while we continue to live as we please. The Psalmist would call on us to ask God to cleanse us and renew a right spirit in us so that the natural consequences of faith prevail and we live in God's blessings.

Recall the days of King David

Asaph was a court musician in the days of David. He knew what blessings the nation had when they lived with the Lord at the center. The days of David were a time of great conquest as countries surrounding them bowed before the Lord's king and nation. It was a time of wealth and ease as God provided.

Perhaps Asaph or a descendant of his who wrote this psalm was thinking of what the nation could be if people bowed down to God again. When the Lord was in charge, it was a golden era for the people of Israel. Now, he saw nothing but problems as the nation forgot its God.

Let us recall the days of David as well. Many of the problems of the world would be smaller or wholly gone if we returned to the Lord. His character and values lead people away from sinful habits into Godly ones that make us a blessing to ourselves and to each other.

Lord, we ask for a reformation across the country so that America might flourish again. It is something that only you can do. We can't restore ourselves, but throw ourselves on your mercy. Turn us to you so that we may see your face and love and be saved. Amen.

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Everyone is welcome**

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