

## A Song for Every Season (Part 5 of 10)

Please, Don't Be Silent God!

Psalm 83

Mark Vroegop

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*O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God! 2 For behold, your enemies make an uproar; those who hate you have raised their heads. 3 They lay crafty plans against your people; they consult together against your treasured ones. 4 They say, "Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; let the name of Israel be remembered no more!" 5 For they conspire with one accord; 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 Asshur also has joined them; they are the strong arm of the children of Lot. Selah*

*9 Do to them as you did to Midian, as to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, 10 who were destroyed at En-dor, who became dung for the ground. 11 Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, 12 who said, "Let us take possession for ourselves of the pastures of God."*

*13 O my God, make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind. 14 As fire consumes the forest, as the flame sets the mountains ablaze, 15 so may you pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your hurricane! 16 Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O Lord. 17 Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in disgrace, 18 that they may know that you alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth (Psalm 83:1-18)*

The big picture story-line of the Bible, often called the meta-narrative, can be summarized with four key words:

- **Creation** – God created the world to display his glory.
- **Fall** – Sin entered the world by Adam and Eve's disobedience and with that came a cosmic brokenness involving conflict, pain, suffering, evil, and death.
- **Redemption** – Jesus, fully God and fully man, came to earth to die on the cross in order that he might initiate a plan to reconcile human beings back to God, making atonement for those who believe on him.
- **Consummation** – There will be day in the future where God will restore everything back to the way that it was before sin entered the world. Redemption through Jesus will be on full display as God welcomes his followers to everlasting life, sin will be judged once-and-for-all, and the Devil will be eternally confined to the Lake of Fire.

Right now we live between Redemption and Consummation. The death and resurrection of Jesus has made personal renewal a real possibility as people individually receive Jesus as their Savior. But during this period, Christians live in a spiritual tension as they long for the full reality of salvation to come. We long for the day when “our faith shall be sight,” for the day when God makes **everything** new. But for now, we wait – caught between two worlds.

This waiting is not easy because we see the effects of sin in the world, and we know that this is not the way that things should be. Additionally, there are moments when this low-grade ache for renewal reaches a desperate fever. There are times when it seems that evil, sin, and the brokenness of the world is not only real and present; it appears to be winning. And this is deeply disturbing at any level – personally, with friends, or family, or nationally, or globally. For those who know and love the glory of God in the face of Jesus, this appearance of a looming and potentially victorious evil creates outrage. “This cannot be!”

The question then is this: **When life looks bad, what do you say?** Psalm 83 answers that question, and it helps us to see that **divine silence or delay doesn’t mean it’s over.**

Once again we see that the Psalms speak to an important season of life that all of us will experience. We find yet another song for every season. Psalm 1 showed us two paths. Psalm 8 displayed the majesty and the mercy of God. Psalm 9 helped us learn how to link praise for the past to trust in the crucible. And Psalm 34 showed us that close call moments help us see life differently. Underneath Psalm 83 is a principle: Loving God’s glory makes you long for righteousness to flourish and your heart ache when evil seems to be winning. When life looks bad, what do you say?

## **The Ache**

Psalm 83 begins with spiritual groan. It is as though the Psalmist Asaph reached a point where he could no longer contain what he was feeling or perhaps had to vent his frustration. Verse 1 simply and directly states what is on his mind and heart. The rest of the Psalm explains why he would say what he does and what he desires.

The ache of his heart and the theme of this Psalm is “**delay no longer.**” Asaph apparently knows what it is like to live in a world filled with evil, and he emotionally wrestles with God’s silence or his delay. He sees the swelling flood of evil and opposition, and he longs for God to do something.

Therefore he says, “*O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God!*”(83:1). God’s silence, holding his peace and being still are all ways of saying that action by God is needed. Asaph wants more than just communication from God; he wants for God to act. He is appealing to God to come and help.

Notice that waiting and asking for help are not mutually exclusive terms. In other words, we are commanded to wait upon the Lord, but our waiting is a prayerful one – a time for seeking the Lord. Therefore, to ask for help continually or desperately doesn’t negate the waiting. John Calvin put it

this way: "It is unquestionably our duty to wait patiently when God at any time delays his help; but, in condescension to our infirmity, he permits us to supplicate him to make haste."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore when you are hurting, waiting, and scared, talk to God! Ask him to act. Impatience with God is not asking him to act; it is demanding him to act. There is a world of difference. But there is another side as well. Faith-filled waiting is not a morbid, fatalistic silence; it involves rugged wrestling and asking for God to act. *"O God don't keep silence."*

## The Crisis

There was a reason why this Psalm was written. We are not told specifically in the Psalm, and it cannot be determined with absolute certainty. But there is a very interesting parallel in 2 Chronicles 20 with a king named Jehoshaphat.

King Jehoshaphat ruled over Judah, the Southern Kingdom, and he was a spiritually-minded reformer. He battled against the cultural evil in Judah, restored spiritual vitality, and led a time of renewal with the people of God (see 2 Chronicles 19). However, a moment of crisis came upon the entire nation.

Jehoshaphat learned that an alliance of the surrounding nations had formed, and that they were planning on attacking. Upon learning this news, Jehoshaphat led his people to seek the Lord. He called for a sacred assembly in Jerusalem where they would seek the Lord together. Listen to what he prayed:

*"O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you. 7 Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?... 10 And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy— 11 behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit. 12 O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chron 20:6-12)*

Well, in the midst of this assembly a man named Jahaziel stood up and prophesied that the Lord would deliver them – "Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God" (2 Chron 20:15). God did win the victory for them. When they went out to meet the army, dead bodies were everywhere.

What is fascinating here is the fact that Jahaziel was a Levite and one of the sons of Asaph. It may be that he wrote this Psalm before or after this moment. The parallels are noteworthy. Let's see what Psalm 83 says:

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Volume 5 – Psalms 36-92*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing, 1999), 338.

### **1. Evil is growing (v 2)**

Asaph expresses his concern about what he sees. God's enemies are growing, getting stronger, and stirring. *"Your enemies make an uproar; those who hate you have raised their heads."* The Psalmist hears the drumbeat of evil around him, and it is getting louder. Therefore, he is alarmed. Asaph is not coming to God as an informant as if God were unaware of this growing issue. Rather he is expressing concern about the rise of evil.

### **2. We are hurting (v 3)**

Verse three shifts the focus from God's enemies to God's people. The problem is not just that evil is growing; the issue is that the evil is threatening those who love and know God. This is personal. These enemies of God are developing plans for evil, and Asaph calls upon God's compassion for his people as a motivation to do something. He says *"they consult together against your treasured ones."*

Asaph knows that God cares for his children, and that is what makes his heart ache. The growing threat and God's love seem to be contradictory. They aren't, but it generates the prayer. Part of living on earth and being a lover of God is living with the tension of pain and providence. In other words, God deeply cares for his people but his ways do not always makes sense to us.

Yet, in the midst of the pain, it is spiritually helpful to cry out to God, to express to him your hurt, and, at the same time, putting your hope in him.

### **3. The future looks scary (v 4)**

Asaph goes even further in verse four. He has heard about the plans of those who are evil, and it is not good. It was not uncommon for a nation to do some "saber-rattling" before a battle to try and intimidate the opposing nation into submission.

About 150 years after Jehoshaphat, another King named Hezekiah faced a similar situation when Sennacherib, the King of Assyria began to attack Judah and encircled the city of Jerusalem. The Assyrian King sent a letter to the Hezekiah and the people of Israel:

*'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11 Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered?'" (2 Kings 19:10-11).*

Hezekiah's response was to take go to the temple and spread the letter before the Lord in prayer. Here is what he said:

*"O Lord the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. 16 Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living*

*God.... 19 So now, O Lord our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone" (2 Kings 19:15-19).*

And that night God delivered Judah again when the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 soldiers, causing the Assyrian army to flee for their lives. Once again, God won!

#### **4. We are overwhelmed (vv 5-8)**

The final element of the crisis is the sheer size of the opposition. Asaph identifies that there the other nations are teaming up, forming a covenant, and developing an alliance against Judah. Verses 6-8 list the forces of evil: Edomites, Ishmaelites, Moabites, Hagrites, Gebalites, Ammonites, and the Amalekites. These had joined forces with the Philistines, people of Tyre, and Asshur.

If you were to plot all of these nations on a map, it would be pretty obvious that they were completely surrounded. That reminds me of a quote from the mini-series Band of Brothers. In the midst of World War II as the paratroopers were dropped behind enemy lines, Lieutenant George Rice warns Lieutenant Richard Winters saying, "Looks like you guys are going to be surrounded." Winters replied, "We're paratroopers, Lieutenant. We're supposed to be surrounded."

I love that quotation because it captures the difference between reality and perspective. Even though Judah was completely surrounded, God could still rescue them. It was only a matter of what they saw. Aren't you glad that Psalm 83 is in your Bible? I can only imagine how many of us have felt exactly what Asaph is saying. Things are looking bad, but there is still hope. Let's see what he prays next.

### **The Request**

Now that you understand the crisis and the ache of the Psalmist's heart, we can better understand what he says in his request. And what is remarkable about these next verses is how unbelievably God-centered they are. Asaph is not just longing for deliverance; he is longing for God's name to be exalted. There are five requests.

#### **1. Rescue us again (vv 9-12)**

Asaph looks back and times in the past where God clearly and definitively delivered his people. In theological terms, these are called historical redemptive events. In verses 9-12, he identifies two events in Judges by virtue of the names that he lists:

- Midian was the nation and Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah, and Zalmunna were all characters in the story of Gideon. A band of 300 Israelite soldiers defeated the entire Midian army (see Judges 7-8).

- Sisera was a commander of the King of Canaan's armies. Judges 4 records that he fled the battle with Israel's forces who were led by Barak. When Sisera turned into a tent for refuge and fell asleep, a woman drove a tent peg through his temple (see Judges 4).

These were both famous and convincing victories for the nation of Israel, and it was very clear that God had won it for them.

Looking back Asaph longs for God to move in the way that he did before. He wants God to rescue his people again. "Do it again, Lord!"

## **2. Show them your power (vv 13-15)**

However, Asaph's aim is not just to be personally rescued. He links his rescue with the display of God's power and might. In other words, if God moves to save again it will be obvious who God really is. Part of the pain of the moment was the fact that God's power was not on full display.

Therefore, he uses a series of metaphors to capture the picture of power:

- "...make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind" (v 13) – Show them how silly, light and powerless they really are. He's praying "blow them away, Lord!"
- "As fire consumes the forest, as the flame sets the mountains ablaze" (v 14) – What happens in a forest fire? Everything is scorched and people flee. He's praying, "Smoke them out, Lord!"
- "So that you may pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your hurricane" (v 15) – Asaph imagines God chasing them with the full fury of his power. Imagine trying to outrun a tornado. "Chase them down, Lord!"

Now he says all of this not just because he is afraid or mad. He says this because it really grieves him that the wicked person thinks that they are greater than God. Asaph cannot stand to see God treated this way.

## **3. Convert them (v 16)**

Notice what comes next! Asaph wants these purveyors of evil to see themselves in light of who God really is, and then for them to be ashamed. He wants them to know that they are just men so that they will turn to God in repentance.

Asaph's aim is not just vengeance or deliverance. He is looking for conversion: "that they may seek your name, O Lord." The ultimate victory will come when those who oppose God and his people are converted. The Psalmist's real target is the glory of God through people turning to him.

In our day, think about what would happen if a widespread movement of conversions happened. The fastest kind of cultural change happens when people are gloriously converted. And it has happened before. In 1905, a great revival swept the land of Wales, and it is estimated that 100,000

received Christ. The conversions had a direct effect on culture. Colin Hansen, author of "A God-sized Vision" and our speaker for THINK|12 writes:

*"The effect on Welsh society was undeniable. Output from the coal mines famously slowed because the horses wouldn't move. Miners converted in the revival no longer kicked or swore at the horses, so horses didn't know what to do. Judges closed their courtrooms with nothing to judge."<sup>2</sup>*

Evil is thwarted when conversions take place.

#### **4. Judge them (v 17)**

Knowing that not all will be converted, Asaph also prays for God's final judgment. He longs for God's name to be vindicated, and for their punishment to be clear, swift, and eternal. He looks to the ultimate judgment that is still coming in the future as his ultimate hope for God's power to be rightfully recognized for what it is.

But again, the reason why he longs for this is because of the fame of God's name. He looks for judgment on the heels of talking about the conversion of the wicked because he longs for God's name to be hallowed.

It is interesting to note here that divine judgment is equally a part of God's exaltation as his deliverance. In other words, if you take away the possibility of judgment, the deliverance loses its meaning.

#### **5. Exalt Yourself (v 18)**

The Psalm ends with Asaph's ultimate desire: to see God exalted. That is why his heart was aching in the first place. God-lovers and divine glory-beholders long to see the expansion of God's rule and reign. Therefore, he says, *"that they may know that you alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth."*

Notice what he prays. He longs for God's exclusive might and power to be clearly known. He longs for the day when God will make everything right! In conversion and judgment, he longs for God's glory to be seen, known, and felt.

When life looked bad, this is what he prayed. He knew the silence of God did not mean that it was over.

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<sup>2</sup> Colin Hansen and John Woodbridge, *A God-sized Vision – Revival Stories that Stretch and Stir*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2010, 103-104.

## What Do You See and Say?

Psalm 83 asks us an important question about what we see and say when life looks bad. Every one of us will face moments or seasons of life when you are between promise and fulfillment. Allow me to ask you some questions to think about:

1. When you look at the world, do you see the brokenness of sin?
2. Do you love the glory of God such that it makes your heart ache?
3. Do you know the ultimate historical redemptive moment – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – that has the power to change everything?
4. Do you pray with holy discontentment for God’s name to be exalted around the world, in our nation, in your family, with your friends, and in your own heart?
5. Do you long for God to act, not only to rescue you and change your circumstances but because of the glory and fame of his name?

Psalm 83 is a song for a season of silence, a moment when you painfully ponder how long God will allow the brokenness of life to continue.

Some of you are here today and the pain of sin’s effects on your life is so real that you wonder how you could possibly live another day or week. But know that one day – hopefully soon – God will make good on this promise:

*"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:3-4).*

Until then, we wait. With aching hearts and upward focused prayers we say –“Come Lord Jesus, Come!”

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### Summer Challenge:

- Memorization – Psalms 34:7-9  
Reading:
  - — Psalms 74-76
  - — Psalms 77-78
  - — Psalms 79
  - — Psalms 80-83
  - — Psalms 84-87