

Psalm 74: Crucified Faith

by Art Katz

The sermon emphasizes the importance of crucified faith, trust in a God who is absent in the moment, and the need to remember God's covenant and promises in the midst of devastation and ruin.

Scripture: Psalm 74:1

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Crucified Faith"

Description

Art Katz explores the theme of 'Crucified Faith' in Psalm 74, emphasizing the psalmist's cry of despair amidst the devastation of God's sanctuary. He highlights the importance of remembering God's past faithfulness, even when circumstances seem hopeless, and warns against a faith that lacks a cross-centered focus. Katz illustrates the malevolent forces that seek to destroy both God's house and His people, urging believers to maintain their trust in God despite visible destruction. The sermon calls for a deep reverence for God's covenant and a recognition of the spiritual warfare that continues today, encouraging believers to respond with faith rather than fear. Ultimately, Katz reminds us that true faith is tested in the absence of God's immediate presence, reflecting the suffering of Christ on the Cross.

Transcript

The cry of the psalmists is frequently, if not always, from the place of despair: "O God, why do You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smite the sheep of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation which You acquired long ago." Often God is appealed to remember past events. The faith of the psalmist is that the God who was faithful then, even though things look despairing now, will yet come through. True faith is a crucified faith. The line of attack of the enemy of our souls is to devastate the faith by making it a non Cross-centered faith.

We need to understand the vitriolic hatred toward God and the people of God by the powers of darkness. When they get their opportunity, they destroy everything in the sanctuary; nothing is spared: "Your foes have roared within Your holy place. They set up their emblems there." The emblems of the enemy have come right into the house of God and probably, if we would think about it a bit, we would see those same evidences around today. "At the upper entrance, they hack the wooden trellis with axes, and then with hatchets and hammers, they smash all its carved work."

This may well be a description of the temple in Jerusalem, which was one of the seven marvels of the ancient world. It had intricate artwork of ivory and gold. There is a malicious hatred that wants to destroy its beauty and smash it to smithereens. This is what is being expressed here. This enemy has no mercy,

no sympathy, and no consideration. The destruction is not just to undo something but to utterly grind it to powder and destroy its beauty. You just have to get the sense of how malevolent and vicious this hatred is against God because that same hatred is also against God's people.

"They set your sanctuary on fire. They desecrated the dwelling place of Your name." Something is going on behind the scene that is subtle and sinister, but deadly. Its wisdom and character is out to destroy and to bring to ruin the faith of God and the house of God. This psalm is given to alert believers of every generation. Do not be deceived by our pleasant middle-class existence as if we live in the best of all worlds. The ancient enemy is as intent now as he was then to bring his destruction.

In fact, his intensity might be the greater now because his time is short and he knows that it is coming to an end. The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. The world is at enmity with God, and if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. The enmity might be disguised, but it is there, and when you touch it, it will flare up. The final defeat of the powers rests on our response to the trials and vexing things. We have a hint of this by what is suggested in Ephesians 3:10 in terms of a demonstration of the wisdom of God.

Godly wisdom responds to utter malignity with utter magnanimity. "They burn all the meeting places of God in the land." The enemies of God hate it when God's people come together. But then the cry to God is, "How long, O God, is the fool to scoff?" We have to recognize that the heart of the psalmist's cry is not for himself, or even for an Israel that is being devastated. If this is what is happening to God's holy temple, can you imagine what is happening to the people and to the land itself?

However, the cry of the psalmist is occasioned by the anguish of suffering that comes when he knows that God's name is being desecrated, and that God is not defending His own name. That paralyzing thing is exactly what Jesus experienced at the Cross: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Jesus suffered the utter abandonment of the Father when He was most urgently and desperately needed in the crisis of the greatest attack against Him. This is what the psalmist is lamenting.

How many of us know this kind of suffering and lament? "How long, O God, is the fool to scoff? Is the enemy to revile Your name forever?" There is no seeming evidence of any end to the anguish. From every appearance, the enemy has completely won the day. It looks hopeless, but this is what abandonment by God means. When understood rightly, this is one of the deepest aspects of the Cross. If the enemy completely destroyed the temple in all its beauty, what would happen to Jesus if He fell into those same hands and was defenseless and powerless before them?

What would they do to Him if they had the same opportunity? In fact, the powers did have the same opportunity, and we cannot even begin to imagine the devastation that fell on Jesus, physically and morally. The same reviling, mocking, and destruction were visited upon Him. The enemy's tactic is fear and intimidation by looking at the visible thing that is before us. Will we react in fear, will we be intimidated by the thing that is visible, or will we trust God? That is why the psalmist is still talking to God and appealing to Him, "How long are You going to let this go on?"

I know You are there; You have not yet revealed Your hand. You have allowed the devastation of Your own temple, and Your name has been reviled, but You are still there to call upon. You are still God." This is crucified faith; it is when you trust in a God who is absent in the moment that He is so desperately and urgently needed." Crucified faith is qualitatively different from any other "faith". At its heart is the earnest desire for truth that would risk the loss of all things, even those things that we think are biblically correct.

Unless we are willing for the loss of something, we have not the jealousy for the truth of it. We can afford to hear a critical question about the truth of our faith. We always need to be examined. We always need to have our faith checked. We are invited to "examine yourselves" lest we be out of the faith. We either have a crucified faith, or we will end up "crucifying" those who oppose us. The most exquisite form of spiritual suffering is to experience the absence of God. It is when God does not act to defend His name.

This is what drives the psalmist to lament. It is an excruciating pain to experience God's allowance of His own name to be defiled by men who have come in and looted His sanctuary, smashed its ornaments, and reduced the building to rubble. Where is God in that? And yet, the basis for the psalmist's faith lies in God and His faithfulness in the past. He is revived by the remembrance of God's power as Creator: "Why do You hold back Your hand? Why do You keep Your hand in Your bosom?"

Yet God, my King, is from of old, working salvation in the earth." The psalmist knows God as Creator; that He has the authority as King, and yet He is not demonstrating Himself as He ought. And then God is reminded by the psalmist of what He is and who He is. "You divided the sea by Your might, You broke the head of the dragon in the waters of Leviathan." In other words, "You conquered Your most formidable opponents; so what stops You now? "You crushed the head of Leviathan; You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

You cut open springs and torrents; You dried up flowing streams. Yours is the day You have made. You established the luminaries and the sun; You fixed all the bounds of the earth. You made summer and winter" What more could be said about God as Creator than these few verses? What then is our puny little situation in the light of that testimony? Not incidentally, it is the doctrine of God as Creator that has been ferociously attacked in modern times by evolutionary theories. There is a link between God as Creator and God as Redeemer; and He has no greater ability to redeem than He has to create.

Redemption is nothing less than re-creation. "Remember, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs, how an envious people reviles Your name. Do not deliver the soul of Your dove to the wild animals; do not forget the life of Your poor forever. Have regard for Your covenant." The psalmist makes one final appeal to God by reminding Him of His covenant: "Aren't you the God who made a covenant with us by Your blood? Didn't You come into union with Your people? Didn't You make a promise? Didn't You say that You would be our God and we would be Your people?"

Okay now, we're calling for that." I do not believe God is insulted when You talk that way. Not only are you appealing to God to have regard for His covenant, you yourself have been brought to have regard for it. This is your "ace up your sleeve." If you have not this, you have nothing. If there is no effectual and actual covenant with God, you are defenseless and powerless. If your faith has become kind of matter-of-fact, whereby you are saying the right things but without the vitality, then this crisis of what is happening to God's house ought to compel you to reappraise, respect, and revere the covenant.

Only when you have this deep reverence of the covenant, then you can remind God, "This is a time when we really need to see Your part in the covenant and to see You fulfill it." If God is sovereign, and no-one can do anything against us except that God allows it, how then has the devastation described by the psalmist taken place? Where was God? Was it a statement of God's displeasure and judgment for failing to come into the true faith? Even in His name? Could destruction, occasioned by spiritual superficiality, be registered upon a person physically in order that the physical destruction would bring us to such a cry toward God that we might be restored in right relationship?

Would God be willing to allow His own temple be brought down in order to have the true faith revived? If that is true historically with Israel, what about presently for that people, and what does this mean for the Church? How far will God go with the Church, as the house of God, in order to bring it to Himself in truth? "Have regard for Your covenant; for the dark places in the land are full of violence." Violence is always the unmistakable sign of the wicked. They always express themselves violently.

"Do not let the downtrodden be put to shame. Let the poor and needy praise Your name. Rise up, O God! Plead Your cause. Remember how the impious scoff at You all day long." Scoffing is a deadly condition to be in. "Do not forget the clamor of Your foes, the uproar of Your adversaries that goes up continually." Silence, quiet, peace, and self-control are a statement of godliness. But boisterousness, noise, tumult, chaos are characteristic of the enemies of God. We need to have a greater respect for silence because it is the last thing that the psalmist mentions in his appeal to God: "Look, Lord, they're not only devastating Your house, but they're doing it with noise.

They're loud about it, and they're vulgar about it. They're obscene about it. They're desecrating Your place and Your name with their mouths and vain speech." To be in the place of peace and quiet in the midst of tumult is a gift; and it is possible. We are going to be standing in places of tumult and noise and accusation and confrontation and threats to our life. To maintain our peace in those situations is to be His true witness. At the same time, it is a demonstration that defeats the powers of darkness who cannot intimidate us to the point where we would lose our own peace.

"My peace I give unto you." The peace of God is a cherished thing. The psalm does not have a "happy" ending. It speaks of Israel's devastation, but there are implications here that go far beyond. There is a hint of unresolved issues that can only be reconciled with the Lord's coming and kingdom. The first verse is, "Why do You cast us off forever?" This sounds like Israel's final, permanent, and fixed condition. Though this is not true, God allows the psalmist to feel it as truth, and yet, at the same time, to believe God, despite every appearance to the contrary under the uttermost conditions of devastation and ruin.

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