

Exposition on Psalm 80

by St. Augustine

Psalm 80 is a call to conversion, illumination, and perfection, where God's people are transformed and renewed in Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 78:1, Psalm 79:3-4, Psalm 79:7, Psalm 80:2-3, John 12:24, Romans 8:6, Romans 10:4, 2 Corinthians 13:4

Topics: "Christ's Advent", "Church Symbolism"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the Psalms, focusing on the Advent of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the symbolism of the vineyard representing Christ and the Church. He delves into the significance of Asaph's testimony, the importance of Christ's coming to change people for the better, and the need for God's intervention to convert and save us. Augustine emphasizes the need for God's guidance, the fullness of knowledge found in love, and the power of God to transform weakness into strength through faith. He reflects on the history of the Jewish nation as a vineyard, its downfall, and the hope for a new vineyard to be perfected by God's hand upon the Son of Man.

Transcript

1. ...If perchance things obscure demand the office of an interpreter, those things which are evident ought to require of me the office of a reader. The song here is of the Advent of the Lord and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of His vineyard. But the singer of the song is that Asaph, as far as does appear, enlightened and converted, by whose name ye know the synagogue to be signified. Lastly, the title of the Psalm is: For the end in behalf of them that shall be changed; that is, for the better. For Christ, the end of the Law, Romans 10:4 has come on purpose that He should change men for the better. And he adds, a testimony to Asaph himself. A good testimony of truth. Lastly, this testimony does confess both Christ and the vineyard; that is, Head and Body, King and people, Shepherd and flock, and the entire mystery of all Scriptures, Christ and the Church. But the title of the Psalm does conclude with, for the Assyrians. The Assyrians are interpreted, men guiding. Therefore it is no longer a generation which has not guided the heart thereof, but now a generation guiding. Therefore hear we what he says in this testimony.

2. What is, Thou that feedest Israel, hearken, You that conducts Joseph like sheep? Psalm 78:1. He is being invoked to come, He is being expected until He come, He is being yearned for until He come. Therefore may He find men guiding: You that conducts, he says, Joseph like sheep: Joseph himself like sheep. Joseph himself are the sheep, and Joseph himself is a sheep. Observe Joseph; for although even

the interpretation of his name does aid us much, for it signifies increase; and He came indeed in order that the grain given to death might arise manifold; John 12:24 that is, that the people of God might be increased....You that sits upon the Cherubin. Cherubin is the seat of the glory of God, and is interpreted the fullness of knowledge. There God sits in the fullness of knowledge. Though we understand the Cherubin to be the exalted powers and virtues of the heavens: yet, if you will, you will be Cherubin. For if Cherubin is the seat of God, hear what says the Scripture: The soul of a just man is the seat of wisdom. How, you say, shall I be the fullness of knowledge? Who shall fulfil this? You have the means of fulfilling it: The fullness of the Law is love. Romans 13:10 Do not run after many things, and strain yourself. The amplitude of the branches does terrify you: hold by the root, and of the greatness of the tree think not. Be there in you love, and the fullness of knowledge must needs follow. For what does he not know that knows love? Inasmuch as it has been said, God is love. 1 John 4:8 Appear. For we went astray because You did not appear. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasse Psalm 79:2. Appear, I say, before the nation of the Jews, before the people of Israel. For there is Ephraim, there Manasses, there Benjamin. But to the interpretation let us look: Ephraim is fruit-bearing, Benjamin son of right hand, Manasses one forgetful. Appear Thou then before one made fruitful, before a son of the right hand: appear Thou before one forgetful, in order that he may be no longer forgetful, but You may come into his mind that hast delivered him....For weak You were when it was being said, If Son of God He is, let Him come down from the Cross. Matthew 27:40 You were seeming to have no power: the persecutor had power over You: and You showed this aforetime, for Jacob too himself prevailed in wrestling, a man with an angel. Would he at any time, except the angel had been willing? And man prevailed, and the angel was conquered: and victorious man holds the angel, and says, I will not let you go, except you shall have blessed me. Genesis 32:26 A great sacrament! He both stands conquered, and blesses the conqueror. Conquered, because he willed it; in flesh weak, in majesty strong....Having been crucified of weakness, rise in power: 2 Corinthians 13:4 Stir up Your power, and come Thou, to save us.

3. O God, convert us. For averse we have been from You, and unless You convert us, we shall not be converted. And illumine Your face, and we shall be saved Psalm 79:3. Hath He anywise a darkened face? He has not a darkened face, but He placed before it a cloud of flesh, and as it were a veil of weakness; and when He hung on the tree, He was not thought the Same as He was after to be acknowledged when He was sitting in Heaven. For thus it has come to pass. Christ present on the earth, and doing miracles, Asaph knew not; but when He had died, after that He rose again, and ascended into Heaven, he knew Him. He was pricked to the heart, and he may have spoken also of Him this testimony which now we acknowledge in this Psalm. You covered Your face, and we were sick: illumine Thou the same, and we shall be whole.

4. O Lord God of virtues, how long will You be angry with the prayer of Your servant? Psalm 79:4. Now Your servant. You were angry at the prayer of Your enemy, will You still be angry with the prayer of Your servant? You have converted us, we know You, and will You still be angry with the prayer of Your servant? You will evidently be angry, in fact, as a father correcting, not as a judge condemning. In such manner evidently You will be angry, because it has been written, My son, drawing near unto the service of God, stand thou in righteousness and in fear, and prepare your soul for temptation. Sirach 2:1 Think not that now the wrath of God has passed away, because you have been converted. The wrath of God has passed away from you, but only so that it condemn not for everlasting. But He scourges, He spares not: because He scourges every son whom He receives. Hebrews 12:6 If you refuse to be scourged, why do you desire to be received? He scourges every son whom He receives. He who did not spare even His only Son, scourges every one. But nevertheless, How long will You be angry with the prayer of Your servant?

No longer your enemy: but, You will be angry with the prayer of Your servant, how long? There follows: You will feed us with the bread of tears, and wilt give us to drink with tears in measure Psalm 79:5. What is, in measure? Hear the Apostle: Faithful is God, who does not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able to bear. 1 Corinthians 10:13 The measure is, according to your powers: the measure is, that you be instructed, not that thou be crushed.

5. You have set us for a contradiction to our neighbours Psalm 79:6. Evidently this did come to pass: for out of Asaph were chosen they that should go to the Gentiles and preach Christ, and should have it said to them, Who is this proclaimer of new demons? You have set us for a contradiction to our neighbours. For they were preaching Him who was the subject of the contradiction. Whom did they preach? That after He was dead, Christ rose again. Who would hear this? Who would know this? It is a new thing. But signs did follow, and to an incredible thing miracles gave credibility. He was contradicted, but the contradictor was conquered, and from being a contradictor was made a believer. There, however, was a great flame: there the martyrs fed with the bread of tears, and given to drink in tears, but in measure, not more than they are able to bear; in order that after the measure of tears there should follow a crown of joys. And our enemies have sneered at us. And where are they that sneered? For a long while it was said, Who are they that worship the Dead One, that adore the Crucified? For a long while so it was said. Where is the nose of them that sneered? Now do not they that censure flee into caves, that they may not be seen? But ye see what follows: O Lord God of virtues, convert us, and show Your face, and we shall be whole Psalm 79:7. A vineyard out of Egypt You have brought over, You have cast out the nations, and hast planted her Psalm 79:8. It was done, we know. How many nations were cast out? Amorites, Cethites, Jebusites, Gergesites, and Evites: after whose expulsion and overthrow, there was led in the people delivered out of Egypt, into the land of promise. Whence the vineyard was cast out, and where she was planted, we have heard. Let us see what next was done, how she believed, how much she grew, what ground she covered.

6. A way You have made in the sight of her, and hast planted the roots of her, and she has filled the land Psalm 79:9. Would she have filled the land, unless a way had been made in the sight of her? What was the way which was made in the sight of her? I am, He says, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. John 14:6 With reason she has filled the land. That has now been said of this vineyard, which has been accomplished at the last. But in the mean time what? She has covered the mountains with her shadow, and with her branch the cedars of God Psalm 79:10. You have stretched out her boughs even unto the sea, and even unto the river her shoots Psalm 79:11. This requires the office of an expositor, that of a reader and praiser does not suffice: aid me with attention; for the mention of this vineyard in this Psalm is wont to overcloud with darkness the inattentive....But nevertheless the first Jewish nation was this vine. But the Jewish nation reigned as far as the sea and as far as the river. As far as the sea; it appears in Scripture Numbers 34:5 that the sea was in the vicinity thereof. And as far as the river Jordan. For on the other side of Jordan some part of the Jews was established, but within Jordan was the whole nation. Therefore, even unto the sea and even unto the river, is the kingdom of the Jews, the kingdom of Israel: but not from sea even unto sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the round world; this is the future perfection of the vineyard, concerning which in this place he has foretold. When, I say, he had foretold to you the perfection, he returns to the beginning, out of which the perfection was made. Of the beginning will you hear? Even unto the river. Of the end will you hear? He shall have dominion from sea even unto sea: that is, she has filled the earth. Let us look then to the testimony of Asaph, as to what was done to the first vineyard, and what must be expected for the second vineyard, nay to the same vineyard....What then, the vineyard before the sight whereof a way was made, that she should fill the earth, at first was where? Her shadow covered the mountains. Who are the mountains? The Prophets. Why did her shadow cover them?

Because darkly they spoke the things which were foretold as to come. You hear from the Prophets, Keep the Sabbath day, on the eighth day circumcise a child, offer sacrifice of ram, of calf, of he-goat. Be not troubled, her shadow does cover the mountains of God; there will come after the shadow a manifestation. And her shrubs the cedars of God, that is, she has covered the cedars of God; very lofty, but of God. For the cedars are types of the proud, that must needs be overthrown. The cedars of Lebanon, the heights of the world, this vineyard did cover in growing, and the mountains of God, all the holy Prophets and Patriarchs.

7. Then what? Wherefore have You thrown down her enclosure? Psalm 79:12. Now ye see the overthrow of that nation of the Jews: already out of another Psalm you have heard, with axe and hammer they have thrown her down. When could this have been done, except her enclosure had been thrown down. What is her enclosure? Her defence. For she bore herself proudly against her planter. The servants that were sent to her and demanded a recompense, the husbandmen they scourged, beat, slew: there came also the Only Son, they said, This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and our own the inheritance will be: they killed Him, and out of the vineyard they cast Him forth. When cast forth, He did more perfectly possess the place whence He was cast forth. For thus He threatens her through Isaiah, I will throw down her enclosure. Wherefore? For I looked that she should bring forth grapes, but she brought forth thorns. Isaiah 5:2 I looked for fruit from thence, and I found sin. Why then do you ask, O Asaph, Why have You thrown down her enclosure? For do you not know why? I looked that she should do judgment, and she did iniquity. Must not her enclosure needs be thrown down? And there came the Gentiles when the enclosure was thrown down, the vineyard was assailed, and the kingdom of the Jews effaced. This at first he is lamenting, but not without hope. For of directing the heart he is now speaking, that is, for the Assyrians, for men directing, the Psalm is. Wherefore have You thrown down her enclosure: and there pluck off her grapes all men passing along the way. What is men passing along the way? Men having dominion for a time.

8. There has laid her waste the boar from the wood Psalm 79:13. In the boar from the wood what do we understand? To the Jews a swine is an abomination, and in a swine they imagine as it were the uncleanness of the Gentiles. But by the Gentiles was overthrown the nation of the Jews: but that king who overthrew, was not only an unclean swine, but was also a boar. For what is a boar but a savage swine, a furious swine? A boar from the wood has laid her waste. From the wood, from the Gentiles. For she was a vineyard, but the Gentiles were woods. But when the Gentiles believed, there was said what? Then there shall exult all the trees of the woods. The boar from the wood has laid her waste; and a singular wild beast has devoured her. A singular wild beast is what? The very boar that laid her waste is the singular wild beast. Singular, because proud. For thus says every proud one, It is I, it is I, and no other.

9. But with what profit is this? O God of virtues turn Thou nevertheless Psalm 79:14. Although these things have been done, Turn Thou nevertheless. Look from heaven and see, and visit this vineyard. And perfect Thou her whom Your right hand has planted Psalm 79:15. No other plant Thou, but this make Thou perfect. For she is the very seed of Abraham, she is the very seed in whom all nations shall be blessed: Genesis 22:18 there is the root where is borne the grafted wild olive. Perfect Thou this vineyard which Your right hand has planted. But wherein does He perfect? And upon the Son of man, whom You have strengthened to Yourself. What can be more evident? Why do ye still expect, that we should still explain to you in discourse, and should we not rather cry out with you in admiration, Perfect Thou this vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and upon the Son of man perfect her? What Son of man? Him whom You have strengthened to Yourself. A mighty stronghold: build as much as you are able. For other foundation no one is able to lay, except that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 3:11

10. Things burned with fire, and dug up, by the rebuke of Your countenance shall perish Psalm 79:16. What are the things burned with fire and dug up which shall perish from the rebuke of His countenance? Let us see and perceive what are the things burned with fire and dug up. Christ has rebuked what? Sins: by the rebuke of His countenance sins have perished. Why then are sins burned with fire and dug up? Of all sins, two things are the cause in man, desire and fear. Think, examine, question your hearts, sift your consciences, see whether there can be sins, except they be either of desire, or of fear. There is set before you a reward to induce you to sin, that is, a thing which delights you; you do it, because you desire it. But perchance you will not be allured by bribes; you are terrified with menaces, thou do it because you fear. A man would bribe you, for example, to bear false witness. Countless cases there are, but I am setting before you the plainer cases, whereby ye may imagine the rest. Have you hearkened unto God, and have you said in your heart, What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but of his own soul suffer loss? Matthew 16:26 I am not allured by a bribe to lose my soul to gain money. He turns himself to stir up fear within you, he who was not able to corrupt you with a bribe, begins to threaten loss, banishment, massacres, perchance, and death. Therein now, if desire prevailed not, perchance fear will prevail to make you sin....What had evil fear done? It had dug up, as it were. For love does inflame, fear does humble: therefore, sins of evil love, with fire were lighted: sins of evil fear were dug up. On the one hand, evil fear does humble, and good love does light; but in different ways respectively. For even the husbandman interceding for the tree, that it should not be cut down, says, I will dig about it, and will apply a basket of dung. Luke 13:8 The dug trench does signify the godly humility of one fearing, and the basket of dung the profitable squalid state of one repenting. But concerning the fire of good love the Lord says, Fire I have come to send into the world. Luke 12:49 With which fire may the fervent in spirit burn, and they too that are inflamed with the love of God and their neighbour. And thus, as all good works are wrought by good fear and good love, so by evil fear and evil love all sins are committed. Therefore, Things set alight with fire and dug up, to wit, all sins, by the rebuke of Your countenance shall perish.

11. Let Your hand be upon the Man of Your right hand, and upon the Son of Man whom You have strengthened Yourself Psalm 79:17. And we depart not from You....You will quicken us, and Your Name we will invoke Psalm 79:18. You shall be sweet to us, You will quicken us. For aforetime we did love earth, not You: but You have mortified our members which are upon the earth. Colossians 3:5 For the Old Testament, having earthly promises, seems to exhort that God should not be loved for nought, but that He should be loved because He gives something on earth. What do you love, so as not to love God? Tell me. Love, if you can, anything which He has not made. Look round upon the whole creation, see whether in any place you are held with the birdlime of desire, and hindered from loving the Creator, except it be by that very thing which He has Himself created, whom you despise. But why do you love those things, except because they are beautiful? Can they be as beautiful as He by whom they were made? You admire these things, because you see not Him: but through those things which you admire, love Him whom you see not. Examine the creation; if of itself it is, stay therein: but if it is of Him, for no other reason is it prejudicial to a lover, than because it is preferred to the Creator. Why have I said this? With reference to this verse, brethren. Dead, I say, were they that did worship God that it might be well with them after the flesh: For to be wise after the flesh is death: Romans 8:6 and dead are they that do not worship God gratis, that is, because of Himself He is good, not because He gives such and such good things, which He gives even to men not good. Money will you have of God? Even a robber has it. Wife, abundance of children, soundness of body, the world's dignity, observe how many evil men have. Is this all for the sake of which thou dost worship Him? Your feet will totter, you will suppose yourself to worship without cause, when you see those things to be with them who do not worship Him. All these things, I say, He gives even to evil men, Himself alone He reserves for good men. You will quicken us; for dead we were, when to

earthly things we did cleave; dead we were, when of the earthly man we did bear the image. You will quicken us; You will renew us, the life of the inward man You will give us. And Your Name we will invoke; that is, You we will love. You to us will be the sweet forgiver of our sins, You will be the entire reward of the justified. O Lord God of virtues, convert us, and show Your face, and we shall be whole Psalm 79:20.

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