

REDEMPTION

To be perfectly honest, some of the Psalms are just not that exciting to read. I love the psalms of praise and those that recount God's attributes and care for mankind, but the psalms of lament and those that call for retribution upon enemies don't really do a lot for me. Not that I can't relate; I have prayed those kinds of prayers myself. Except for one thing that caught my eye as I was reading Psalm 83.

The psalm begins with the usual call for God to arouse Himself and take action against Israel's enemies. It notes not only who they are, but also what they do. "See how your enemies are astir, how your foes rear their heads. With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish" (v.2-3). Then the psalmist calls upon God to do again the kinds of amazing victories He did in the time of the judges through Deborah and Gideon (see chapters 4, 7-8 of Judges).

Then he says, "Make them like tumbleweed, O my God, like chaff before the wind. As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze, so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm" (v. 13-15). Here is where my prayer would end, but the writer continues, "Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your name, O Lord" (v.16). In the midst of the onslaught, this writer has God's heart in view, the heart that does not wish for any to perish, but all – even His and our enemies -- to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

An episode from the life of Paul, recorded in 1 Cor. 5, is similar. There was sexual immorality in the church at Corinth. Paul was outraged and grieved, and told them they should "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord" (v.5). His punishment was not for their revenge, but for his salvation and God's glory.

In the same way, we are to view our trials and misfortunes as God's discipline. They are not punishment for our wrongs -- Jesus took the punishment we deserve – but are certainly opportunities for us to learn. The writer of Hebrews put it well. "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? . . . Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness" (Heb. 12:7, 10).

Everything God does He does for our redemption and His glory. Maybe I should remember that the next time I am praying for someone who's given me a hard time. If my heart were in tune with His, it would be for my good and certainly an increase in holiness.