

## 2022-01-14 Psalm 44

As we hear the first nine verses of Psalm 44, we are reminded of many ways Israel believed God had helped them in the distant past, both economically and politically. The psalmist also acknowledges that God's people remained faithful to their God, and believed in God's deliverance.

But starting in verse 10, the poet enumerates ways which he believes indicate strongly that God's assistance is no longer available. He writes, God, now you are far off (rather than close at hand, helping us), now our enemies have taken all our goods, they have consumed our lives like sheep, and we are scattered "among the heathen", people laugh at us losers and our foreign ways; we are filled with shame. These words have suggested to scholars that Psalm 44 was written not long after the ruling classes of Judah were utterly defeated and taken to Babylon.

Starting in verse 18, the psalmist declares that, even though God has obviously forsaken us, we have not forsaken our God, even though (verse 22, which St Paul quotes in Romans), even though "For thy sake also are we killed all the day long, and are counted as sheep appointed to be slain."

Verse 23 opens the poem's final section, asking God to wake up, spring into action, as in the days of old. The music becomes quite dramatic at this point.

As I listen to the Psalm, I reflect both on how these words could well have described how the wealthy, educated, and priestly classes of Jews suffered during their initial years of captivity, after they had lost absolutely everything—their beloved Temple, the arc of the covenant, all their libraries, houses, businesses, workers, everything. Even so, they did not switch from the worship of YWHW to that of the gods of the victorious Babylonians. Instead, they remained steadfast in their faith.

But as I hear these words, I am also reminded that, if ever things go badly for us, we can draw inspiration from these words so that we, too, remain faithful to our God, even when we do not understand God's ways, or why things have unfolded in such a hostile manner.

2022-01-15 Meditation for Saturday in the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Ordinary Time is now available at: <https://pgimf.org/meditations/>

[The opening theme song with a poetic paraphrase begins:]

*Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe,*  
O Pow'r of love, all else transcending,  
*Die sich in Jesu offenbart;*  
In Jesus present evermore,  
*Ich geb' mich hin dem freien Triebe,*  
I worship thee, in homage bending,

## Psalm 44

Lyrics: Translated by Myles Coverdale (1488-1569)

Music: Barry Ferguson (b. 1942)

Artists: Choir of Rochester Cathedral, Barry Ferguson (dir.), Roger Sayer (organ)

[We understand that God helped us in the distant past.]

- 1 We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us \*  
what thou hast done in their time of old;
- 2 How thou hast driven out the heathen with thy hand, and planted them in \*  
how thou hast destroyed the nations, and cast them out.
- 3 For they gat not the land in possession through their own sword \*  
neither was it their own arm that helped them;
- 4 But thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance \*  
because thou hadst a favour unto them.
- 5 Thou art my King, O God \*  
send help unto Jacob.
- 6 Through thee will we overthrow our enemies \*  
and in thy Name will we tread them under, that rise up against us.
- 7 For I will not trust in my bow \*  
it is not my sword that shall help me;
- 8 But it is thou that savest us from our enemies \*  
and putttest them to confusion that hate us.
- 9 We make our boast of God all day long \*  
and will praise thy Name for ever.

[The psalm and its music suddenly shift as the psalmist notes that God no longer seems to be helping.]

- 10 But now thou art far off, and putttest us to confusion \*  
and goest not forth with our armies.

11 Thou makest us to turn our backs upon our enemies \* [we flee from them]  
so that they which hate us spoil our goods. [we lost everything]  
12 Thou lettest us be eaten up like sheep \*  
and hast scattered us among the heathen. [we are dispersed throughout a foreign land]  
13 Thou sellest thy people for nought \* [taken into slavery]  
and takest no money for them.  
14 Thou makest us to be rebuked of our neighbours \*  
to be laughed to scorn, and had in derision of them that are round about us.  
15 Thou makest us to be a by-word among the heathen \*  
and that the people shake their heads at us.  
16 My confusion is daily before me \* [I do not understand God's actions]  
and the shame of my face hath covered me;  
17 For the voice of the slanderer and blasphemer \*  
for the enemy and avenger.

[The psalmist pledges that in spite of everything going wrong, we will still follow God.]

18 And though all this be come upon us, yet do we not forget thee \*  
nor behave ourselves frowardly in thy covenant.  
19 Our heart is not turned back \*  
neither our steps gone out of thy way;  
20 No, not when thou hast smitten us into the place of dragons \*  
and covered us with the shadow of death.  
21 If we have forgotten the Name of our God, and holden up our hands to any  
strange god \*  
shall not God search it out? for he knoweth the very secrets of the heart.  
22 For thy sake also are we killed all the day long \*  
and are counted as sheep appointed to be slain. [Romans 8:

[A plea for God to spring into action and make things right again.]

23 Up, Lord, why sleepest thou \*  
awake, and be not absent from us for ever.  
24 Wherefore hidest thou thy face \*  
and forgettest our misery and trouble?  
25 For our soul is brought low, even unto the dust \*  
our belly cleaveth unto the ground.  
26 Arise, and help us \*  
and deliver us for thy mercy's sake.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost \*

as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

[Closing words to our theme song:]

*O! dass diess jeder Sünder wüsste,*

O! that every sinner would know this,  
*Sein Herz wohl bald dich lieben müsste.*

His heart must soon surely love You.

Translation kindly provided for Meditations by John Guggenheimer.

Evan  
j.evan.kreider@ubc.ca