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Psalm 94  
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### Help Me God!

In 1851, Herman Melvil published a novel about a whaling captain named Ahab whose leg had been bitten off at the knee by an infamous giant white whale called Moby Dick. The story describes Ahab's vengeful pursuit of Moby Dick. He gathers a crew. Sets out for their whaling expedition. Once Moby Dick is found, Ahab becomes consumed by the hunt. But once again, nature prevails, Moby Dick escapes and all but one of Ahab's crew perish in the treacherous waters.

The victim loses.

The enemy wins.

Not the happily ever after ending that we wished there would be.

But isn't that so much like life.

Innocent people get hurt, taken advantage, or even killed, while the perpetrators get off scot free.

At times, it can seem like no one is taking notice. Like God is away from his watch and neglecting the injustice occurring around us. We want to do something about it. We may even want to take measures into our own hands. Like Ahab, revenge can consume us and others can be sucked into its devastating vortex.

In moments like this, the Psalms encourage us to lift up our heads to the mountains. To know that the one who created all things is the one from whom we get our help in times when we feel helpless. When someone is not coming to our rescue or is neglecting our cause. To believe that He who can shake the earth and cause mountains to crumble both sees and hears our circumstance.

No matter how large or small our battle might be, God will take up our charge. God can handle whatever concerns us today. The need to set things right doesn't belong to us. It doesn't have to consume us.

Psalm 94 gives words to these moments when all we can do is lift our hands to the Lord and cry out "Help Me God."

Let's listen to Psalm 94 and consider what insight scripture might provide when we feel that we've been wronged in some way.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

David, the writer of the Psalms, had his fair share of enemies, seen and unseen. As king, there were invading nations aimed to conquer the Promised Land. There were members of his own court who desired the throne for themselves. As a father, there were enemies within his own household, his own sons who wished David great harm. And as a man after God's own heart,

sometimes, David was his own worst enemy battling between his flesh and that which he knew was right.

David's Psalm 94 provides us both a lens to look through and springboard to launch into knowing how to handle life when it feels like the world is out to get us. When our enemies always seem to prevail and there is no one to pick up our cause. We will also see how to deal with enemies who are non-Christian and enemies who are believers in Jesus Christ. As I set out to write today's sermon, I asked "What wisdom may God provide to help us forge a path forward when we've been hurt?"

First, we must acknowledge that justice belongs to the Lord and not to us. It's not our God given duty to make things right. God knows what we do. And we each will have to give an account for those actions to God one day.<sup>1</sup>

Just before Moses died, he gave his parting blessing to his successor Joshua and the people of Israel. He lifted up a song of the most important things for God's people to remember after he was gone.

He reminded them of the offenses committed by their own people who turned away from God and worshipped idols, becoming Israel's enemies. He reminded them that God didn't need his people to fight on his behalf. That battle didn't belong to them.

God says, "Have I not kept this in reserve and sealed it in my vaults? It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them. The Lord will judge his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes we Christians think that God needs us to fight on his behalf. In doing so sometimes we end up doing more harm "in God's name" because of the injustices we do onto others."

Around the 4th century AD, there were some people who moved out to the desert to escape the worldliness plaguing the church. They were called the desert fathers and mothers and people would flock to them for their spiritual guidance.

The story goes that "a young man came to his spiritual mentor [in the desert] named Sisoës. The young man blurted out, "I was hurt by my brother in Christ, and now I'm angry and I want to avenge myself."

The older man tried to comfort him, but he also gave him a gentle warning: "Don't do that, my child. Rather, leave vengeance to God."

But the young Christian refused to listen to Sisoës. Instead, he became even angrier and loudly said, "I will not quit until I get even."

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 4:5

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 32:34-36

When Sisoes saw that reason alone wouldn't change the young man's heart, he quietly said, "Let us pray, brother."

After a pause, Sisoes offered the following prayer: "O God, apparently we no longer need you to take care of us since we can now avenge ourselves. From now on we can manage our own lives without your help."

When the young man heard this prayer, he immediately repented. Falling at Sisoes feet, he cried out, "Have mercy on me. I am not going to fight my brother anymore."<sup>3</sup>

My friends, are we in the midst of such a battle right now that our actions only seem to dig us deeper and deeper into a hole? How might God be inviting us to put down our arms and trust that he will work things out on our behalf?

But let us understand this, turning the battle back over to God doesn't mean that we sit back and do nothing.

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>4</sup>

So what can we do?

We can love our enemies and pray for them.

We can pray that God would stop their actions. That may mean bringing to their attention what they are doing because they may not even be self aware. Or it may even mean reporting their actions to another responsible person. There was a time when things shared with a pastor could be kept in strict confidence. That is still largely true unless you are being hurt or thinking about hurting others or yourself. In that case, I am required by law to report that information to the police and to Presbytery so that we can get the help that is needed.

Another thing we can do is pray for God's divine justice. God alone knows all things and knows what is best to set things right. God doesn't need our suggestions on how to punish our enemy.

We can pray and be honest with God about how we are feeling.

Notice how honest and angry David seems to be before God... "Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. How long will the wicked, O Lord, how long will the wicked be jubilant."

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<sup>3</sup> From Preaching Today website.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5:43-48

It's ok to acknowledge our anger before the Lord. God created us with this emotion so that when we are wronged, we can release any built up pressure. Here's the catch, the Bible says, "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."<sup>5</sup>

What does it mean to give the devil a foothold?

Think of it this way. A rock climber looks for cracks and crevices in a rock face to place one's hands and feet in order to scale a mountainside. These are weak places where the rock has been crushed or cracked by pressure overtime through certain geological forces.

In the same way, when we are hurt or offended by others and we allow ourselves to stew on that wound for any length of time, the pressure can create holes or weak spots in our person that allow the devil to know how and where to dig in deep and not let go. So that the wound festers and becomes part of us.

How to prevent the devil from getting that foothold is to pray humbly with the knowledge that none of us stand before God in our own righteousness but that "we all fall short of God's glory at times."<sup>6</sup>

So we pray to forgive our offenders, just as we have been forgiven.

Jesus said, "For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."<sup>7</sup>

He also told Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."<sup>8</sup>

An unforgiving heart creates footholds for the devil to take root in our lives and rob us of the kingdom of heaven that God wants us to experience. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>9</sup> Forgiveness adds a little teflon to our person so that offenses don't stick as easily and create such footholds.

I think also that an unwillingness to forgive yields too much power and control to our enemy. Until we can forgive, we are held in bondage by them until we can let the offense go. Forgiveness takes back that power, turns it over to God, and allows God to deal with them as he desires.

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<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 4:26

<sup>6</sup> Romans 3:22

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 6:14-15

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 16:19

<sup>9</sup> The Fruit of the Spirit identified in Galatians 5:22-23

Please know that I am not suggesting that forgiveness is always easy or that happens over night. As most things with God, it takes time. Sometimes you can do this work on your own. But sometimes it may require the guidance of a spiritual director or professional counselor to help you unpack the degree of trauma that was experienced. Sometimes our prayer can be simply, “Lord give me the desire to forgive my enemy.”

We may ask, “What if our enemy isn’t a believer in Jesus Christ?”

We can pray for their conversion and healing. That their hearts would be softened to the love of God and be reconciled with God.

I believe that what is really at the heart of any bully is a self-hatred which forces them to act out on other people. Perhaps in the same way the Apostle Paul did when he persecuted Christians before meeting Jesus himself.

What if our offender is a fellow believer in Jesus Christ?

Jesus says, “If your brother or sister sins against you, go and show them their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have gained them over. But if they will not listen to you, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they refuse to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen to even the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

Again he says, “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”<sup>10</sup>

Once we have forgiven our enemy and turned over the hard work of justice to the Lord, we can begin to pray for theirs and our healing. As we pray, God works to change our hearts toward them and we can begin to love them with same love that God has for them.

The Apostle Paul said to the Romans, “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary:

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 18:15-18

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”<sup>11</sup>

My friends, when we let God be God we can move on in our lives.

So may we believe that God is keenly aware of all injustice that is both seen and unseen. May pray for our enemies that they may be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and come to know his love. May we leave vengeance in God’s hands to deal with others in his time and ways. And may we never give up the hope that in all things “God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his good purposes.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 12:9-21

<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:28