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Hear My Prayer

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Hear My Prayer

Abstract

"God listens to the forsaken; he hears their cry. We are the forsaken, and he hears our crying."

Posting about comfort in suffering from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

inallthings.org/hear-my-prayer/

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Hear My Prayer

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May 15, 2017

Ethan Brue

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 102:1-17](#)

[Exodus 13:17-22](#)

[Acts 7:17-40](#)

It is hard to write about sadness and affliction. Our words tend to rationalize, excuse, or evade painful reality; often, they seem to steer us away from the present hurt toward a past memory or a future possibility. When confronted with distress in others, words dry up in our throats. If the words we seek do come out, they sometimes seem awkward or out of place. Thus, the best commentary on the prayer of Psalm 102:1-12 may be the blank page. Silence.

I was meditating on Psalm 102 when a friend sent me a devotional, based on another prayer from I Chronicles 4. A different prayer altogether—a short prayer, which has generated more words of commentary than it probably deserves: the prayer of Jabez. A prayer with very little context for us to lean on. A prayer that asks for God to increase the author and free him from pain.

God grants it. End of prayer.

After receiving and reading the Chronicles devotional, I went back to the tragedy of Psalm 102 and read on. “Hear my Prayer, O Lord.” The Psalmist is not asking for much...just to be heard, just for a glance or for something to let him know that God at least recognizes that the Psalmist is there. He doesn’t even ask to be pain free; he just asks God to take a look his way. “For you have taken me up and thrown me aside...I wither away like grass.” Then something happens mid-prayer, and the tone changes—but not along the trajectory of the prayer of Jabez. We don’t even know if the Psalmist gets anything he longs for. The camera angle zooms out from the painful affliction to a wider panorama. The affliction doesn’t leave, but it loses focus in the landscape surrounding it. The past and the future dissolve into the present and what we see is neither “good ol’ days” sentimentality nor a future pipe dream. We begin to hear other songs of voices not yet created. Voices whose loosened tongues are now employed in the praise of the Lord who sits on a throne above fragile constellations. With all the noise of the creation laid out before him—jammed freeways, crumbling empires, exploding stars, imploding solar systems—the most astounding picture is this: the fact that this same Lord hears the nearly inaudible hoarse groan of a “dead man walking.” What is even more incomprehensible is that somehow this prisoner of affliction receives more than he bargained for. He is given a glimpse into the very heart of God, a landscape more expansive than any territorial expansion.

I turned again to the prayer of Jabez, but now I was reading in the context of Psalm 102. This time, the verses read like tragedy. Asking for the world of his choosing, he gets it. But that’s all. How empty. How unresolved. The scriptural silence around the passage creatively masks the known conclusion of this prayer. Like a “worn out garment” Jabez is soon discarded, and like an “evening shadow” Jabez fades into the darkness, with not a single moan or groan to be heard. His enlarged territory perishes with him in a whisper, never to be found or known again.

I can’t explain how, but Psalm 102 seems less hopeless to me than I Chronicles 4. It’s not that I am tempted to somehow twist the suffering in Psalm 102 into hidden blessing. The Biblical narrative doesn’t go there. At best, our present suffering somehow measures up differently when seen through an empty tomb, that’s all. It neither goes away nor is any less painful. And this is what makes Psalm 102 such a powerful creedal statement. God listens to the forsaken; he hears their cry. We are the forsaken, and he hears our crying.

We are noticed.

Now, it is in his hands—literally. And that's good news.