

Biblical Reflection 13:

“What should we do when we feel so powerless and angry?”

May 21, 2021

In the assault on Mindat and other Myanmar cities this past week, homes were bombed, markets were burned down, and more people were arrested and killed. More and more people are in hiding, fleeing for their lives, or scrounging for food and shelter in the jungles and villages. As I watch the news reports with horror, and pray for God’s help, I often feel so powerless and sad. And angry.



Psalm 137 comes to mind. In this imprecatory psalm (psalms of lament that call for God’s fierce judgment on evil-doers), Israelite exiles express great sorrow for all that they lost and hatred for their Babylonian oppressors. We read, “By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. ... Our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ [But] How could we sing the LORD’S song in a foreign land? ...O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!”

I used to puzzle over how such violent words could be in the Bible. But now I understand. In fact, is there anyone who weeps over the suffering in Myanmar who does not understand these raw emotions? I think not.

Forcibly taken far away from their homes, powerless to change their circumstances, the Israelites were filled with the same kind of grief, rage, and desperation that so many of us feel right now. And how they hated those who had destroyed their homes, their way of life, and so many of their hopes and dreams for their future. And so, in their prayers, they needed to grieve all that they had lost (known as, “lament”), and they had to express the depth of their anger and their demand for justice.

And so do we.

When we weep...and rage...and let ourselves feel the depth of our frustration and pain, the way the Israelites did, we are crying out, “This hurts so bad! I can’t take away the pain. What they did to us and are doing to us is very wrong. We don’t accept it, but we don’t know how to fix it by ourselves. LORD, help us. LORD, make it right!”

And the amazing thing is, when we are willing to lament and call out to God in such an emotionally honest way, we often find release from our distress. The prayer may begin in great turmoil and rage, but through this kind of lament, we will not remain in our sorrow and rage forever. Though we may still feel helpless to change our circumstances, we will experience the power that comes from speaking the truth and connecting with our Creator in the midst of our powerlessness. Peace and renewed strength will soon follow.

The Apostle Peter expressed this same spiritual truth with this simple word of instruction and encouragement for those who were suffering persecution in Asia Minor. He

said, "Humble yourselves...under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you." (1 Pet. 5:6-7, NRSV) Amen.

You are in my prayers every day.

With Christ's love,

Dr. Tim

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Next time, I am going to talk more about how we can experience the power of God when we feel powerless, by discussing what Paul meant when he said, "When I am weak, then I am strong."