

mankind to no purpose? Who can live and not see death? Who can save himself from the power of Sheol?

(vv 47-48)

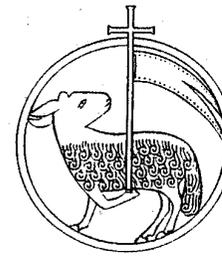
Yes, the evil is bad enough and sometimes seems to be gaining the day, but it is not the last word. There are ultimately no dead ends, for in God's purposes everything has meaning. The Jewish monarchy as such may have ceased, but the Davidic line is fulfilled in Jesus the risen and glorified Messiah. No persecutions, pogroms or even the holocaust can undo that. Christians may be scoffed at, derided, martyred - may even put each other to death in the name of Christ, but Jesus is still Lord and the forgiver of sin. Families, nations, churches may seem to be falling apart but God remains Lord and Master, infinite in love and compassion. Death does not gain the day. Instead, as the final enemy, it is destined to be completely overthrown and God will then be all in all. (1 Cor 15: 24-28).

So there are no loose ends, nothing incomplete, unfulfilled or senseless: not even frozen embryos which have to be left to die. At the last all will fall into place, healed where needs be, and part of the great mosaic. When the fragments are gathered up nothing will be lost (John 6:12). This is our song of hope, our gospel message, now as throughout the ages. We can make the words of the Psalmist our own once more:

I shall sing always of the loving deeds of the Lord; throughout every generation I shall proclaim your faithfulness (v 1).

Happy indeed are the people who have learnt to praise him and rejoice in his name all the days of their life (vv 15-18).

*Blessed be the Lord for ever. Amen and Amen.
(the final verse).*



FAITH praying and believing ON THE EARTH

Nothing Shall Be Lost - Psalm 89

Two thousand years since the birth of Jesus? A tiny space of time compared with the billions of years scientists speak of when exploring the origins of the universe - yet more than long enough, surely, for the world to have been transformed out of all recognition by the impact?

But as we look around and hear tell, we can't help feeling sometimes that 'everything goes on exactly as it has always done since the world began' (2 Peter 3:4). If anything things have got worse. We need to be heartened and cheered up, especially since, as Christians, we are meant to be showing everyone else what there really is to celebrate at the start of a third millennium.

'The Kingdom of God is at hand,' Jesus cried out, so things must be different - God reigns, supreme and for ever. If we haven't noticed this, and it seems to have had very little effect, then maybe we ignored the first part of the message: REPENT ie, stop and think, change your attitude of mind, be expectant and believing.

Years before the coming of Jesus, the writer of Psalm 89 was tempted to a like despondency. He looked back at God's tremendous promises to King David:

I have made a covenant with the one I have chosen, I have sworn an oath to my servant David: 'I shall establish your line for ever, I shall make your throne endure for all generations.'

(vv 3-4)

I have found David my servant and anointed him with my sacred oil. My hand will be ready to help him, my arm to give him strength. No

enemy will outwit him . . . He will call to me, 'you are my father, my God, my rock where I find safety'. I shall give him the rank of firstborn (and) maintain my love for him for ever. . .
(*cf vv 19-37*)

And so the promises tumble over one another, the hope and expectancy reach crescendo pitch - until we come to verse 38:

Yet you have spurned your anointed one, you have rejected him and raged against him . . . defiled his crown and flung it to the ground.
(*cf vv 38-45*)

The contrast is extreme. David's successors lament because the promises seem to have failed abysmally. Things have gone from bad to worse so what went wrong?

We are asking the same questions ourselves. It can't be that God has let us down. His covenant and calling are irrevocable, for the Jewish people as for the Christian Church (*Romans Chaps 10 & 11*). Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever, his steadfast love endures through all generations.

If we look carefully back over Psalm 89, however, we can see that the writer in part answers his own question. The covenant, in a sense, is conditional. By the very nature of the case it must be two-sided. Men and women also have their part to play else they would be mere puppets or robots. A king in Israel was not to be a tyrant, a seeker of power and esteem for the sake of his own aggrandisement. Yahweh alone was truly King and the earthly ruler was his servant for the sake of the people. Indeed the people too were a 'nation of priests and kings' destined to serve Yahweh for the salvation of the whole world. Thus they would need to be disciplined and trained to fulfil their calling: 'Be holy, as I AM HOLY.' said the Lord. It is not less so for ourselves. Psalm 89 says something of what will happen if we don't keep up to scratch:

If his children forsake my law and do not conform to my judgements, if they violate my statutes and do not observe my commandments, then I shall punish their disobedience with the rod, their iniquity with lashes.
(*vv 30-32*)

If things went wrong for Israel, then, and have done so for us in the last two thousand years, it could be that *we* are in large part to blame - we haven't kept faith and so have had to endure the inevitable consequences. That, after all is what God's so-called 'punishment' is. So is there no hope? Far from it. We are not to despair and get all guilt-ridden. Of course we have sinned, for all fall short of the glory of God, and of course the world is in a dreadful mess. But it *is* God's world.

Back for a moment to Psalm 89. Having just threatened punishment for transgressors Yahweh goes on to say immediately:

Yet I shall not deprive him of my love, nor swerve from my faithfulness. I shall not violate my covenant, nor alter what I have promised . . . I shall not break my word to David.
(*vv 33-35*)

However faithless we might be, however horrid our behaviour, God remains faithful. His love will not fail. Our vision must be vaster than the immediate present or a dreaded future. We must learn to see God's providential purposes in all the vistas of history until now - his training and guiding of his people, moulding them for himself. We must hope for the days ahead. This is the message we must pass on to our contemporaries, with the same confidence as the Psalmist:

Who is there like the Lord? . . . The heavens are yours, the earth yours also; you founded the world and all that is in it . . . strength of arm and valour are yours . . . your throne is founded on righteousness and justice - your hand is mighty, your right hand lifted high.
(*cf 5-18*)

Even the powers of evil, the dark forces, are overcome: 'You crushed and slew the monster Rahab and scattered your enemies with your strong arm'. (*v 10*). It is our Christian confidence to know this is so. The devil did his worst at Calvary but Jesus harrowed hell and rose victorious over death, raising a fallen world with him. This is fact, this is so. If Satan still prowls about he has no real sway. His time is short and he is merely having a last desperate fling. Our generation, in fact, cries out like the Psalmist as it faces the anguish of the ultimate futility - death:

Remember, (Lord), how fleeting is our life! Have you created all