

“The LORD hears the cry of the poor” (Ps 34:7a). Psalm 34 teaches us “human brokenness can be healed by the LORD when it is brought to him, but self-sufficiency blocks him out.”ⁱ The New Testament bears this out.

Peter is a proud man who believes he has the courage to stand up for Jesus at the time of his passion. Peter fails and denies Jesus three times before the cock crows. In his failure, Peter recognizes his own weakness and turns to the LORD for help. On Sunday, Jesus entered the locked room where the apostles hid for fear of the Jews. Jesus offers them the peace of Christ and breathes on them, so they receive the Holy Spirit. Receiving the gift of courage through the Holy Spirit, Peter is a new man, more reliant on God for help than the proud man who failed.

Filled with the Spirit, Peter acts boldly throughout the Acts of the Apostles. He no longer denies his knowledge of Christ, but boldly proclaims it. “If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is ‘the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.’” (Acts 4:9-11). Peter takes no credit for the miracle but gives all the credit to Jesus as he should.

Ordered to remain silent and speak of Jesus no longer, Peter and John choose to take marching orders from Christ and not the Sanhedrin who try to intimidate them into silence. “The Lord hears the cry of the poor.” And so, they cry out in prayer: “Lord, take note of their threats, and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness, as you stretch forth [your] hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30).

As evidence that the Lord has heard this latest cry for help, the earth quakes as a sign of divine presence. (4:31). Many who are sick and cursed by evil spirits also cry out for help. “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves. Many are the troubles of the just man, but out of them all the LORD delivers him” (Ps 34:19-20). The prayers of the sick are answered as Peter walks through the streets and casts a healing shadow upon the sick and the disturbed. Miraculous cures abound (Acts 5:15-16).

Having threatened Peter and John with severe punishment if they continued to proclaim the Good News, the religious authorities follow through on their threats and have them imprisoned. Once again, “the LORD hears the cry of the poor” and sends an angel to free them from prison and instruct them to go back to the temple and boldly proclaim the Good News. Peter who had denied Christ 3 times on Good Friday, more than makes up for his past failures as he obeys God and gives witness in public time and time again.

Amidst the struggles and trials and lockdowns of the pandemic, one might ask is the LORD still listening to the cry of the poor? The great cries of pain of the repentant sinner are always heard. “This poor one cried out and the LORD heard, and from all his distress he saved him” (Ps 34:7). Jesus forgives our sins.

Nor does the LORD turn a deaf ear to our mourning for those who have died. “The LORD is the redeemer of the souls of his servants; and none are condemned who take refuge in him” (Ps 34:23).

ⁱ Kriegshauser, Laurence. Praying the Psalms with Christ. Pg. 97.