

IS YOUR CALL TO GOD DESPERATE OR FRIVOLOUS?

Today's Text: (a) Psalms 3-7; (b) Acts 12: 1-19

Extracts:

1. Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God." ... *I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill* [Ps. 3: 1, 2, 4]
2. Now, about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter was therefore kept in prison, but *constant prayers was offered to God for him by the church* [Acts 12: 1-5]

*In almost every country, there is a telephone number that you can call in an emergency. It is 911 in the United States and 999 in the United Kingdom. In Trinidad & Tobago, you call 999 to reach the police and 990 for the Ambulance or Fire Service. Callers of these numbers are **desperate** and require **immediate attention**. Delay is dangerous. For example, if a house is on fire and the Fire Service does not respond soon after receiving the distress call, there may be no house to save later. If a person has suffered heart attack and the Ambulance Service does not respond right away to a distress call, there may be no patient to save later. Therefore, the emergency line is very important and providers do everything to keep the line open and working all the time.*

*However, we also know that the system is often abused. In other words, some of the calls can be regarded as **frivolous**. For example, a female caller reportedly dialled the emergency line to report an injured pigeon! A male caller wanted urgent help because he could not find his eyeglasses! Apart from wasting the energies of the staff of emergency departments, such calls prevent genuine cases from being taken up early enough.*

Many of us approach God in the same way. We think that we are in distress and call Him desperately. When He does not answer, we charge Him with not caring! We hardly accept that we are frivolous. In today's lesson, we shall study how to differentiate the frivolous from the desperate so that we can receive urgent responses to our emergency calls to God's throne in Heaven.

1. Is your call desperate or frivolous?

There is the story of a young shepherd boy who was fond of playing pranks. One day, he rushed to the village to cry, “Wolf! Wolf!” The villagers took up arms and rushed to the fields to save his flock. It was a false alarm and the young man enjoyed his laugh. On another occasion, he did the same thing and the people responded as before. Again, it was a false alarm. Then, one day, a pack of ferocious wolves *actually* attacked the young man’s flock. He ran to the village as in the past to ask for help. Thinking that he was up to his old tricks, *nobody* paid attention. By the time he returned to the pastures, his flock and the wolves were all gone!

Many of us relate to God the same way that the young man had related to the villagers. The first two times that he went to them for help, he did not need any help. However, having damaged the relationship between himself and the villagers, they turned him down when he desperately needed help. Many of us bombard God with frivolous requests or those that we can deal with by ourselves. Does it occur to us that there are billions of other people who are also trying to get His attention?

Yes, God is Almighty, Omnipotent and Omniscient. But, you try for a moment to put yourself in His position. In a hilarious movie, *Bruce Almighty* (2003), a television journalist (played by funny Jim Carrey) asked God for the power to play God for a season. The request was granted. Soon after, Bruce found that his eardrums were almost bursting! When he asked God where all the noises were coming from, He told Bruce that those were desperate prayers from the earth. Since Bruce was now almighty, he should go ahead and deal with their problems. Bruce simply called up a computer screen on which were written the names and addresses of earth people and their requests. He noticed that the number was growing by the million every second. To save himself the ordeal of responding to each one separately, he simply typed, “Yes” to be applied to ALL the requests. You know what followed? Chaos! In one community, so many people won the multi million-dollar lottery that, by the time they had shared the money, winners got pennies and cents! In anger, they rioted and damaged public property.

How then can we separate desperate calls from the frivolous when we go to God in prayer? Here are some useful leads, among others:

a) *Your track record with God*

Some people are users and are never givers. They only know that you exist when they need your help. After receiving the help, they throw you away like a ladder, without realizing that they may need you again when they are climbing down. How would you treat them should they come back in the future?

God must have been addressing such people when He said, “If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness. *Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me*” [Ps. 50: 12, 14, 15]. When the elders of Israel came desperately to the prophet Ezekiel to seek the Lord’s face, God replied, “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you.’” Their sins of rebellion and idolatry had put a wedge between them and God [Ezek. 20: 1-8].

Why do you remember that God exists only when you need Him? If you have not established a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, that should be the first thing to do before calling on Him. After all, you cannot call 911 (or its equivalent in your country of residence) if you have no access to a telephone!

b) *Have you exhausted the abilities that God has already given you?*

God can make available to us abundant resources. At the same time, He does not like to waste. For example, after miraculously feeding five thousand people and they were all filled, Jesus told His disciples, “Gather up the *fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost*” [Jn 6: 12]. In like manner, when God has endowed us with certain abilities, He expects us to exhaust them before coming back for more!

When the children of Israel appeared trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian troops pressing hard on them, they cried desperately to God for deliverance. What did God say to Moses? He asked Moses, “*Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea*” [Ex. 14: 15-16]. That was the rod that God had earlier empowered when He told Moses, “You shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs” [Ex. 4: 17]. Therefore, God considered the people’s desperate call to Him frivolous because He had already empowered them.

Compare that with Peter’s case. Peter, John and the early church leaders had moved with boldness after they had been empowered by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. However, after Herod had killed James and imprisoned Peter, hoping to kill him after the Passover, they had run out of their options. It was only then that the disciples went on their knees, and “*constant prayer* was offered to God for him by the church.” In answer, God sent an angel to deliver Peter out of prison [Acts 12: 5]. This was not a frivolous case.

Many believers have abandoned God's power with them out of fear "for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of *power and of love and of a sound mind*" [2 Tim. 1: 7]. Jesus is standing by the door and knocking and He says, "If anyone *hears My voice and opens the door*, I will come in and dine with him, and he with Me" [Rev. 3: 20]. God has already given you good ears and His word, but what if you refuse to hear or to obey? God has already given you good legs but what if you refuse to get up from your knees or wicked ways, and move your legs forward to open for Jesus? *Until you do those things*, your desperate call is frivolous.

Let us study Psalms 3-7 to gain more insights into the subject.

2. David makes a desperate call to God

Background

Psalm 3 is historically linked to **2 Samuel Chapter 15**, when David's son, Absalom, revolted against him and David fled. As he fled, Shimei from the family of Saul of the tribe of Benjamin, cursed him continuously and threw stones at him [2 Sam. 16: 5-14]. **Psalm 7** captures David's grief through that ordeal. Therefore, we can consider Psalms 3-7, all written by David, as his desperate call to God at a crucial moment in his life. He had temporarily lost the throne and power on account of the punishment for his sins, following his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah.

David's agony was tremendous. His enemies were numerous [Ps. 3: 1-2] and unrelenting in their attacks [Ps. 4:2]. He was in unending pains and cried a great deal. David wrote, "I am weary with my groaning. All night I make my bed swim. I drench my couch with my tears" [Ps. 6: 6]. He tried hard to be angry against his tormentors while trying not to sin [Ps. 4:4]. For example, when Shimei's cursing persisted, David's men wanted to kill him. David did not allow them. Instead, he said, "It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day" [2 Sam. 16: 12].

The emergency call

Let us see how David went about his emergency call to God:

a) *He asks for forgiveness*

We already know about the famous Psalm 51, which was David's confession for his sins against Uriah. He did not stop there. He knew that only God could help him during that desperate hour. As he cried to Him, David added, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak. O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled" [Ps. 6: 2]. As he faced the relentless insults from Shimei, he prayed, "O Lord my God, if I have done this, if

there is iniquity in my hands, ... let the enemy pursue me and overtake me” [Ps. 7: 3, 5].

This is in line with what we had said earlier. It is important for you to first repair the breach in your relationship with God. If you harbour unconfessed sins, go ahead and confess them *right now*. If there are persons that you have offended, this is the right time to apologise to them and to ask for their forgiveness. If there are people who have wronged you, forgive them even when they have refused to apologise to you. That you have forgiven them does not mean that God will not still deal with them. However, you need to reopen the door of communication with God.

b) *He worships and praises God*

In David’s desperate moment, he told God, “I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy. In fear of You, I will worship toward Your holy temple” [Ps. 5: 7]. In another place, he wrote, “I will praise the Lord according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High” [Ps. 7: 17].

It is because of God’s mercy that He is now ready to receive your desperate call. Therefore, you need to first thank Him for granting you audience. The psalmist says, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. *For the Lord is good and His mercy is everlasting*” [Ps. 100: 4-5].

Remember that even before you ask, God already knows what you need. Therefore, make thanksgiving and praise your sacrifice, and when you call Him in the day of trouble, He will answer.

c) *He rests on and trusts in God*

After making his case to God, David stopped fretting and trusted God to answer Him. He wrote, “I lay down and *slept*; I awoke, *for the Lord sustained me*” [Ps. 3: 5]. In another place, David said, “I will lie down *in peace* and sleep, for *You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety*” [Ps. 4: 8].

You cannot claim to trust God when you are still restless after you have placed your desperate call to Him. After all, if the ambulance people were to tell you, “We are on the way,” you would believe them. You would already be nursing the hope of surviving the emergency situation. In like manner, God keeps in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on Him because they trust in Him [Is. 26: 3].

3. Lessons

Examine your circumstances right now. You may be drowning in debts or under the fire of hardship or hunger, unemployment or retrenchment, childlessness or powerlessness, or any other kind of pressures. Before you make that desperate call to heaven, convince yourself that it is not going to be frivolous, that God will answer you even before you call Him.

We learn from today's lesson that a 911 call to heaven is frivolous if we have strained relations with God, due to unconfessed sins or ingratitude, or when we ask God to give us again what He has already granted. Therefore, do the following before you go on your knees:

- Find out what you have done with God's blessings in your life. Are you using your material blessings to relieve the needy, to sustain the church (by paying your tithes and vows) and to glorify God? Are you using your spiritual gifts to edify the church or to advance the work of God? When last did you tell God or your benefactors, "Thank you!"?
- When you offend God or fellow human beings, do you persist in error out of pride or arrogance or rebellion or do you confess right way and seek to be at peace with your neighbours and with God?
- Have you exhausted the spirit of power, love and a sound mind that God has already granted you or fear has paralysed you from using those powers? How much of your desperate situation has been self-inflicted? Is it not possible that seeking reconciliation or admitting your error is the answer rather than asking God to come and rescue you? Have you used the rod that God has put in your hands?
- How cordial is your relationship with God right now? Does He dwell in you? Are you the synagogue of Satan or the temple of the living God?

Heaven helps those who *cannot* help themselves. However, heaven will not keep helping those who misuse the help that they have already received. Therefore, before you get on your knees again in desperation, ask yourself a simple question, "Is my call *really* desperate or *merely* frivolous?"

God has no time to waste!