

Sermon 14, A Profile of the Wicked, Pt. 2, Psalm 10:12-18

Proposition: The second half of Psalm 10 teaches us how to pray like our king for deliverance from the wicked and their evil.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we saw a lengthy profile of the wicked last week in the first part of Ps 10. This psalm describes the behavior, thought process, and motivations of the wicked. We also saw the implicit warnings not to be weak and undernourished in your Christian life, because the wicked especially prey on the weak and the needy by drawing them into their net — i.e., by leading them into temptation. As we saw last week, being a well-fed and godly Christian does not prevent the attacks of the wicked, but it certainly gives you a greater ability to resist them. And our psalm ends with a request to the LORD to confiscate one of the most powerful weapons in the enemy's arsenal. I'm speaking, of course, about the weapon of Fear. Our text this evening begins with a prayer against the evil of the wicked, which we saw described last time. It then moves to a presentation of the problem of evil, and describes prayer to the God who can and does solve the problem, and then some more about why and how He is able to solve the problem of evil. Again, the lesson here is that to pray like our king for deliverance from evil is our best defense against it.

I. Prayer: Stand Up, God!, v. 12

The wicked, as you'll recall from last time, are successful, foul-mouthed, practical atheists who lie about the judgments of God. But God is the King, and He will judge them nonetheless,

despite their beliefs about His inactivity. One of the chief means He uses to bring about that judgment is the prayers of His suffering, needy people, as led by their king.

A. The King Pleads with God to Threaten the Wicked, v. 12a

That's where we pick it up. The King pleads with God to threaten the wicked. That's what this language is referring to. We know that God the Father does not have a body (and the Son didn't have a body either when this psalm was written). So this is a metaphor taken from posture. The picture is of a man sitting down, and then jumping to his feet and lifting his arm to strike.

What does this image mean? It refers to the power of God. It calls Him to stand up and raise His arm in a highly threatening manner, to prepare to frighten the wicked with the prospect that He will attack them.

If you are talking in a certain way to my wife and I'm just sitting there, you probably don't worry that I'm offended. But if I leap to my feet and raise my arm to clobber you, you realize quickly that you have offended me and that you are going to feel my wrath.

That's what the king asks for. God, threaten these wicked ones with the might of your ferocious right arm!

B. The King Pleads with God to Remember the Afflicted, v. 12b

The LORD is asked to assume this posture for the sake of the afflicted. Those who are hurting, who have been savaged by the wicked, drawn into their net, brought down into wickedness by the combined arms might of the world, flesh, and Devil, need a strong champion. They are facing powerful adversaries. Who among us can overcome the world? Who can deliver himself from this body of death? Who can go toe to toe with the Devil and prevail? Not me, not you, not St Francis or John Calvin or any other hero of the faith. The only one who is able to rebuke the Devil is the LORD Himself. The only one powerful enough to overcome the flesh is the Holy Spirit of God. The only one who could overcome the world is the Son of God, who was in the world and the world was made by Him.

That Son of God is our king, and he teaches us to pray to His Father to remember the afflicted. Don't stand far off, O Lord. Don't hide yourself in time of trouble. Rather, activate your memory. Remember the afflicted and then visit them! When God remembers the afflicted and how the world, flesh, and Devil beat them down, He should stand up and deliver a blow that the enemies won't soon forget.

Do you pray for this? Most of you have spent a lot of time talking to me about how bad things are out there. I fully agree with you, as you know. But I want to ask: have you pursued the Bible's solution? Maybe the first step is to admit there's a problem. We've done that. But the second step is surely to bring the problem to the attention of the Almighty, the one who can and will fix it through the agency of His Son. When you think of the wicked, don't walk in fear. Talk in faith. Pray to the one who can raise His arm and mow down the hordes of Hell. Ask Him to do that, to remember the afflicted.

II. Problem: Why Do the Wicked Spurn God?, vv. 13, 15

But this sample prayer that our king prays is not the last word in the psalm. Ps 10 goes on to question the problem of evil again. The first verse asked why God allows it; this time, the king asks why the wicked indulge in it. What causes the wicked to scorn God?

A. Answer: The Wicked Don't Believe in God's Justice, v. 13b

The answer is right here in v. 13. The wicked do it because they don't believe in the justice of God. They think that He is like them, that He has a soft spot for wickedness, that He has decided to stop governing the world, that He is a Soros DA who is soft on crime and not too worried about wickedness in His district. They couldn't be more wrong, of course. But that's what they believe and that's what they act on to make their decisions. They aren't interested in God's justice. They have no desire to do the right thing because He might call them to account. In their mind, that possibility is about as likely as the earth spinning into the sun. It simply doesn't cross their mind — or rather, they have buried it in their consciousness by lying to themselves with this statement that “God won't require it.” Why do they say that? Because they know He will require it. Their conscience tells them that. So they try to shut it up by repeating their mantras: “We believe in a God of love. Love is love. How can it be wrong when it feels so right?”

Don't let yourself walk in their counsel. Reject their transparent attempts to corrupt you and make you join them.

B. Solution, v. 14

Instead, listen to and imitate our king, who tells us that God will deal with the wicked.

1. The Lord Sees the Wicked, v. 14a

Implant this truth in your mind when you see the wicked doing something evil, and also when you are tempted to join them in believing that God will never see you do the evil thing you're wanting to do. The truth that the king teaches us to sing is that God does see. He has seen every wicked deed. I read a novel recently in which the Jewish main character sees an icon of the Virgin and child, and comments that the Virgin looking back at her seemed to say that her eyes had seen countless acts of evil. That may be true — but the Virgin's power is not where our hope lies, nor where our king tells us to place our hope. We hope in Him, the only all-perceptive, all-powerful one. He sees the wicked and their wickedness. And, unlike the icon, He does something about it. He sees it in order to take it in hand. He looks at it so that He can deal with it.

Does that thought cheer you? It may seem that He is standing too far away to help. But you and I must drive this truth into our minds, that God is actively intervening to set the world right through His Son. He is working to stop the wicked.

2. The Lord Is Trusted by the Helpless, v. 14b

I know I said some hard things about the spiritual immaturity of the helpless last week. Not all suffering Christians are spiritually weaker than they should be, at least not in every sense. Clearly in one sense every Christian is weaker than he ought to be. But now the king reminds us that the helpless, as hapless and unprepared as they might be, do have this going for them: they trust in God. They are helpless, but they commit themselves to the one who can help and has helped. There is a distinction here between those who are weak in the sense of spiritually weak,

i.e., sinful, and those who are spiritually suffering, i.e., persecuted. All Christians are persecuted by the world, the flesh, and the Devil, some more savagely than others. But some, through their own spiritual weakness and naivety, make their own lives harder. I was warning you not to do that, rather than trying to “blame the victim” for a sin that is really the sin of the world and the Devil. But insofar as the problem is your flesh, it is largely your own fault. And of course, if the ruler of this world had nothing in you, you would be less susceptible to walking into his net.

Trust the Lord. Other helpless and weak sinners trust Him, and He has never let them down. Trust Him, and He will never let you down either.

C. Prayer: God, Break Their Arms!, v. 15

In light of the reality that God sees the situation and will take it in hand, the king prays for a specific act of targeted violence. He asks God to break the wicked’s arm. The arm, as we commented a few moments ago on v. 12, is the body part which most commonly inflicts violence. A man with a broken right arm can’t use a sword, for example. He can’t wield a gun or win a boxing match.

This takes me back to college and to a specific fight that I witnessed. Some of the guys from third floor were beating up a guy. I think it was someone from my wing, though I don’t remember specifically. I believe I was a freshman who was not taking part in the fight but simply watching it. One of the participants in the fight was a guy I didn’t care for much, an upperclassman named Michael Garafalo who had a hard drive full of pirated films that he shared over the LAN to the whole campus. Well, Garafalo was standing, feet wide apart, with his back to the wing door, holding it open. I believe that with his upper body he was hurting this other kid I cared about, though the specifics elude me at this distance (the event happened nearly sixteen years ago). Well, the way Garafalo was standing, feet wide apart, knees locked, back to the door, provoked in me a train of thought that I do remember clearly to this day. I was certain then that a well-landed kick in which I sent all my weight crashing into the side of his locked knee would irreparably smash his knee and take him out of the fight.

I know you are all thinking that this sounds like an exceptionally violent and dramatic response to the everyday sort of grappling that takes place in a men’s dorm. And it would have been, and thankfully I didn’t go through with it. Even in the fog of battle, I realized that smashing another man’s knee as thoroughly as I was planning to do would have lifelong repercussions that I didn’t want to be responsible for. And just about the time that I decided the injury to my friend was making my plan a good one, the fight broke up and everyone went back to what they had been doing. The Lord spared me that day from smashing Garafalo’s knee.

But when you pray, don’t hesitate to ask your Lord to perform a similar move, not on a man’s knee, but on his arm. Had I smashed Garafalo’s knee that day, everything I know about anatomy suggests that he would never have walked again. And of course, that’s the point of this prayer. The king asks God to smash the arm of the wicked so they can never raise it against the righteous again. He wants that arm broken beyond healing.

He then says it another way, without the metaphor of the broken arm. He requests that God would search for the evil of the wicked and systematically dispose of it, like an EPA

contractor cleaning a SuperFund site. Search for evil until none is detected at the parts per million level, and the parts per billion, and then even in the parts per trillion range! That is what the king dares to pray, and what we should pray following His example. Our king's prayer will be answered, by the way. God will search out evil until it is undetectable by omniscience itself.

III. Provision: God Has Helped, vv. 16-18

How do we know this?

A. The Lord Reigns, v. 16a

The first reason we know it is that the Lord reigns! He is King now and He will always be King. He has set His Son as King in Zion too, and this psalm is the prayer of our king Jesus and teaches us to think and to pray like He does.

If God is the King, what will His rule be like? Will He exercise arbitrary power? Be a drunken idiot like Ahasuerus in Esther? A crafty and cruel snake Herod or a fox like Herod's grandson? Never! The fact the Lord is king means that justice will prevail, that righteousness will triumph, that love will win and hate will lose. The Lord reigns, and that is our confidence. That is why we dare to pray against the wicked and look for their strong right arms to be shattered. Morning by morning the Lord will destroy the wicked out of the land. Shakespeare's King Richard II gives an excellent summary of how the truth that the Lord reigns comforts those afflicted by the wicked.

Discomfortable cousin, know'st thou not
That when the searching eye of heaven is hid
Behind the globe that lights the lower world,
Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen
In murders and in outrage boldly here;
But when from under this terrestrial ball
He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines
And darts his light through every guilty hole,
Then murders, treasons, and detested sins,
The cloak of night being plucked from off their backs,
Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves?
So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke,
Who all this while hath revelled in the night
Whilst we were wand'ring with the Antipodes,
Shall see us rising in our throne, the east,
His treasons will sit blushing in his face,
Not able to endure the sight of day,
But self-affrighted, tremble at his sin.¹

¹ Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, Act 3, Scene 2.

The king's return plucks the cloak of night from the back of the wicked and makes him tremble naked in the glare of God's hostile gaze. The Lord reigns! That is your comfort. He is a greater monarch than Richard II, than David, than Solomon himself. Because the Lord reigns forever and ever, His light will expose and destroy evil. You just wait.

B. The Lord Overcomes the Nations, v. 16b

Our king also leads us in singing the truth that the nations have perished from Yahweh's land. The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine: for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev 25:23 ASV). Because the Earth is Yahweh's, the nations who have perished have perished from off His land. Already three thousand years ago when King David wrote this Psalm, many nations had perished. Their cultural identities had been wiped out, their languages had died, and their lands had passed to others. Who has ever read the history of the inhabitants of Resen or of Lud? What do we know of the dwellers in Scythia?

Nations perish. Where is Byzantium? What happened to the Roman Empire? Where are the Songhai? The Lord's kingship endures, but the mightiest of nations perishes. Only two nations on the earth today can plausibly claim a sort of unbroken succession over more than two millennia as one ethnicity possessing one land: China and Japan.

So no matter how powerful the wicked seem to be, recognize that the Lord's kingship endures even while the wicked perish off His land. It's not their land, where God needs permission to operate. It's His, where they need His permission to continue.

C. The Lord Hears the Humble and Responds, vv. 17-18a

Two more points: the Lord hears the humble and responds. We know that the wicked cannot triumph forever, for God listens to the prayer of His king and of all afflicted ones. He hears the prayer of the humble. In fact, He even hears their desire. Even when we are too weak and crushed to pray, God hears us and heeds us. The needs of the humble who fear God are taken into account. He hears, and He responds. He bends His ear close so He can hear. He doesn't sit up in Heaven with His earbuds in, paying no attention to our pleas. He can hear even unspoken desires, and He bends His ear close to hear our words.

1. Heartening the Humble, v. 17b

When He hears those prayers, He responds by putting heart back into the humble. He makes them hearty; He gives their hearts strength to continue to suffer and pray, even sometimes strength to beat back the wicked and overcome them through the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.

Have you ever experienced this? When suffering from the world, the flesh, and the Devil, have you felt God restore your heart with strength to continue fighting and suffering? I know I have! Many is the time when an hour of prayer has heartened me tremendously and given me the confidence to go on in the fight against sin, whether my own or the world's. I know God does this, just as my king testifies here that He does it.

2. Vindicating the Orphan, v. 18a

The Lord also vindicates the orphan. That is, He renders a verdict in their favor. As you all should know, the orphan is the image of the one most at the world's mercy. He is not old enough to take care of himself, yet his father — his natural protector — is gone. When this happens, God takes it upon Himself to be a father to the fatherless and a protector of the widow. He repeats this countless times throughout the Bible. When the wicked attack the orphan and the orphan brings a complaint before God, God hears that complaint and gives justice to the orphan. He may not always do it in this life, but He does it in the next. He saves the oppressed, those who have been attacked by the world, flesh, and devil.

D. The Lord Confiscates the Wicked's Chief Weapon: Fear, v. 18 (and turns it against them, 9:20)

One of the ways He does this, and the way in which the psalm closes, is that He confiscates one of the chief weapons the wicked wield. That weapon, of course, is fear. When you see God act to deliver, you stop fearing the wicked so much. When you see Jesus alive on Easter morning, your level of fear of death declines dramatically.

It is the fear of death that holds mankind in bondage. It is one of the primary ways that the Enemy succeeds in getting us to do evil. He tells us we will die if we don't sin, that survival is our most important value, that we must do whatever it takes to maintain this biological life. A huge amount of evil in the world comes from the imperative to fit in with the crowd. If the crowd is doing evil, most people will do it too because they don't want to be different. They are motivated by fear — fear of rejection, fear of standing out, fear of being actively persecuted.

But when God intervenes to save, that fear can and does go away. It has been replaced by perfect faith and perfect love. Instead of fearing the Gestapo agent, you can love him.

I'm not talking about Winston Smith, who learned to love Big Brother. I'm talking about actual, Biblical love. Let me give you an example from Romans 11. "As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers" (Rom 11:28 RSV). As Christians, we affirm that the Jews are enemies of the cross of Christ. We also affirm that the Jews are beloved by God despite their status as enemies of the gospel.

How does that make sense? Here's how. Christians love their enemies, and God also loves His enemies. If He didn't, there would be no Christians.

Winston Smith loved Big Brother because he feared Big Brother. After the torture session with the rats, he hated the very thought of challenging the Party. The Ministry of Love had beaten him into submission. That's not what Ps 10 is talking about. Instead, it's talking about taking this weapon of fear and turning it on the wicked. Look at the end of the previous psalm. That's right: the fear of God teaches the nations that they are mere men, and not God. They cannot and will not triumph, for they are up against omnipotence.

When the nations fear God, we are no longer afraid of them. Even before they start fearing God, we stop fearing them because we have a God who's more powerful than they are. No American is afraid of what Eswatini might do to us. We could squish that country like a bug.

No sensible human being is afraid of a gnat. You can crush him without a second thought. Well, to God the wicked are less than nothing and vanity. You can love your enemies rather than fearing them because the threat they present is so small that it's hardly worth noticing. Yes, the whole psalm has dilated on that threat at length. But at the end of the psalm, it tells us that thanks to the powerful judgments of God, that threat is almost invisible. We aren't afraid of earthlings, for we serve the one whose power rules Heaven.

Don't fear! Believe. The Lord reigns, and He will deal with the wicked. Follow your king in praying for this outcome, and know that through your king's sacrifice of Himself, sin is already beaten, the world overcome, and the Devil bound. His mighty Spirit is lusting against your flesh, restraining it and conforming you to the image of Himself. Believe it. Live it. Kiss fear goodbye, and kiss the Son hello. Amen.