

## **PRAY STRONGLY IN EXTREMITIES**

Psalm 109: 1-31 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

What is an extremity? Webster says “it is the place where we have been pushed to the limit, to the terminal point, to the ultimate point of distress, to the moment of danger as death approaches, to the point of the most intense degree of pain, to the uttermost point of being forced to act against our will.” So what is an extremity in any of our lives? I recently read about a group of eagle enthusiasts who were following the life of a pair of eagles that was being monitored on webcam. The happy eagle family, viewed by many via the Internet, unexpectedly came to an extremity. The eagle enthusiasts saw something that was most unexpected. They watched the breakup of a long time happy eagle family. After raising several offspring in previous seasons, the mother again laid new eggs in the spring. But to everyone’s shock, a young female invaded the happy home. When the father eagle started prancing and dancing and cavorting with the young female eagle, the mother eagle flew away, disappeared and the life in those abandoned eggs died. As the enthusiasts watched this drama, questions and accusations flew wildly. Everyone who loved the eagle pair was distraught. Biologists warned the amateur eagle enthusiasts not to attribute human values to birds. But everyone did. They all wanted the original eagle couple to reunite. Every one of those eagle enthusiasts seemed to “know” that the family unit is sacred. As the eagle enthusiasts expressed their sadness, it makes me wonder, doesn’t it make you wonder too, how God feels such incredible grief about human family breakups. One of the eagle enthusiasts blogged saying, “I also wonder about myself: Why do I feel more sadness over the eagles than over the fractured human families in my own community? Clearly, I need to revise my priorities. Divorce is one of life’s worst extremities.” In Malachi 2: 16, God gives us His view of marriage and tells us that marriage symbolizes His covenant with His people—Malachi 2: 11. He takes divorce very seriously and so should we. Divorce is not the extremity in this psalm. Rather, the extremity was false accusations that lead the one who was lying to seek the life of David.

Have you ever been falsely accused and had your reputation dragged through muck and mire to the nth degree—to an extremity of deep emotion? Some of you may have experienced this. I have. I know the horror and terror of hearing and having falsehood and false accusations brought against me. In the ministry, over the past 48 years of my ministry, there are few accusations among the major sins we know of, that somebody has not accused me of. Jesus taught us in Luke 6: 26, “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.” Last year I even experienced someone coming to me to confess some of their past false accusations they spread about me 20-30 years ago. They asked for forgiveness which I gave them. Nevertheless, the sad part about the extremity of

false accusations is that even after they are confessed, it is hard to change the original hearer's minds. False accusations stick. False accusations are like words the judge orders to be struck from the court record, but the one making those false accusations knows full well that though his words are struck from the record, his seeds of false accusation will be hard to strike from the minds of the jurors. When Paul wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy that "all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work," did he mean to include Psalm 109 as part of all scripture? Did he mean that imprecatory psalms with their imprecations or calling down of calamities on the enemies of God were under divine inspiration? Absolutely, he did!" All 66 books of the Bible and all 1189 chapters of the Bible are fully inspired and without error in the original writings.

When we are in deep straits, we can all be known to say strong words. Have you said words recently in extremities that you wish you could recover and cover so they could no longer be remembered? David was in the worst of straits with King Saul after him for many years and Saul for about ten years was leading a large contingent of Israel's army to find David and kill him. After years of being pursued like a partridge in the wilderness, pursued relentlessly, what kind of words would you have prayed to God regarding your enemy, Saul? Before we take aim to shoot down David's imprecatory psalms of calling down calamity on his enemies, specifically perhaps on King Saul who was possessed of an evil spirit, remember what happened twice when David was pursued and had the chance to take revenge.

David's prayer of calamity on his enemy, most likely, King Saul, was not David asking God to give him permission to kill Saul. No, David rather was saying in Psalm 109: 21, "But you, O God, my Lord, deal on my behalf for Your Name's sake, because Your steadfast love is good, deliver me!" In a few words, David is saying, "But you, Lord, do it for me. You deal strongly with my enemy." There are a few needed lessons from this psalm calling down calamity on David's enemy and enemies. I see 3 needed lessons I cannot ignore and they are lessons all of us need to learn, relearn, and most of all, always remember. What are these three lessons?

**LET'S REMEMBER OUR EXTREMITY IS OUR CHANCE TO GIVE OURSELVES TO PRAYER FOR OUR ENEMY.** (I.) Notice Psalm 109: 1-5.

"Be not silent, O God of my praise! For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking against me with lying tongues. They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. In return for my love, they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love." So, we've established that imprecatory psalms are problematic. Where do the

imprecations start? Do these praying down of calamities start at the first verse of Psalm 109? No! Let's start where David starts, because 109 isn't all about imprecations. Psalm 109 doesn't start with imprecations nor end them. Where David started Psalm 109 is with praise to God in worship—"Be not silent, O God of my praise!" God was the object of David's praise. David declared in v. 4 that love was his response to the hatred of his enemy. Remember those who seek God's wrath upon the guilty should be innocent. That leaves very few of us in the driver's seat to use imprecatory prayers. I know as far as praying imprecations upon people God has rather commanded me to bless and not curse—Romans 12: 14, I must bless my enemies. If imprecations are to be used by us as believers, they are only to be used against those so guilty—that they have gone beyond the Spirit's striving with them. This is where God stops me from praying imprecations against someone who is spreading lies against me. I read in I John 5: 16, 17. "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death." This verse reminds me to always pray for my enemies that they will truly repent and not ever have committed a sin leading to death. I caution all of us, in light of the New Testament and the teaching of the apostles, not to quickly begin praying imprecations on our enemies.

The guilt of David's enemy was the offense of his tongue. God takes all our words seriously, and so should we. I have known some fellow believers who have prayed imprecatory psalms. I do not condemn such prayers, but I caution us all to tread carefully here. I often pray regarding our enemy, the devil, "Smite the enemy on the cheekbone." With a New Testament love for my false accusers, I so pray. Paul's words in Ephesians 6: 12 are, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." I must pray Psalm 109: 4.

You and I may personally know our earthly false accuser or accuser's name or names. We may know them well and yet hate what they are doing. Some of the strongest words of malice, hatred, bitterness and false accusations come against us from people who name the name of Jesus—who claim to be saved. We know them. We love them. We know how they have taken something we have said or done and twisted it to imply or outright falsely accuse us of wrong. Often I have been accused of preaching false doctrine because a brother or a sister has taken some offense against me for preaching scripture without holding to their preferential view of a text or preaching out of their preferred translation. I cannot pray David's calamities on them: I must not. Yet when I am so accused and called a false teacher

or a false prophet as I have been, I do lower the boom on the one who is at the bottom of all false accusations. The Bible calls him the accuser of the brethren. Beloved, I warn us all. Be careful. It is so easy to partner with Satan and become an accuser, not the accuser, but an underling accuser of the brethren. We may temporarily become unequally yoked with the enemy. It happens when we see or hear something and quickly put two and two together without examining the facts as a faithful Berean. (Acts 17: 11) When I lower the boom and pray in an imprecatory way and I do at times, I pray with Revelation 12: 10, 11 in view. John on the isle of Patmos reports a day I can hardly wait for. John reports, “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

No pastor can rightly tell one of his flock how to pray in every case, but I can tell you how I pray as your under-shepherd. I adapt Psalm 3: 7 and other imprecatory verses throughout the psalms to pray against the real father of lies, Satan, in John 8: 44. Psalm 3: 7 is David’s imprecation as he cries out to God, “Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheekbone, you break the teeth of the wicked one.” I know Satan is called by many names, and I Peter 5: 8, 9 tells us, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...” If you have ever watched a nature channel, you may have seen a lion coming up to close behind a zebra to seek his supper. Suddenly, he gets kicked in the teeth. Lions kicked in the teeth don’t make it for long afterward. That’s my prayer for Christ’s victory over the devil. That’s how I pray David’s imprecatory psalms and this 109th Psalm with power—I aim my call for God’s calamities and curses to fall on the father of all lies, the accuser of the brethren, and the roaring lion in our lives. At this very moment, I have people who are out to hurt me, but I love them. I do not pray for their calamity. I rather long for God’s conviction and their repentance. I also long for God to smite the enemy on the cheekbone. I pray Psalm 109: 4. Secondly,

**LET’S REMEMBER OUR EXTREMITY IS OUR CHANCE TO TELL GOD OUR VIEW OF SIN AND OUR VIEW OF HIS MERCY FOR US AND FOR OUR ENEMIES.** (II.) Notice Psalm 109: 6-20. These are some of the strongest callings down of calamity in the Scripture. “Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! May his days be few; may another take his office! May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit! May the creditor seize

all that he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil! Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children! May his posterity be cut off; may his name be blotted out in the second generation! May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out! Let them be before the LORD continually, (so) that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth! For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted, to put them to death. He loved to curse; let curses come upon him! He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him! He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones! May it be like a garment that he wraps around him, like a belt that he puts on every day! May this be the reward of my accusers from the LORD, of those who speak evil against my life!”

Imprecatory psalms are far more relevant and applicable to Christians today than any of us would dare to admit. Why do we tend to get so up in arms about these curses or calamitous imprecations poured out on our enemies? Why do we get uneasy about them? Could it not be that we as believers have a distorted view of God, perverted by our own sin. We want to think of God only in terms of love and mercy, but we tend to reject or downplay any view of God that thinks of Him in terms of justice and judgment. We as believers can become soft on sin. We can get caught in Satan’s web and become entangled in a satanic conspiracy. We can so easily adopt thinking summarized by “I’m O.K., You’re O.K.” Such was not the conviction of the psalmist. Most of us know that we are not O.K. Therefore we respond by going easy on others, hoping our laxity will make things go easier on us with the Lord. Let me tell you this. If we had David’s courage to call sin sin, we might find the conviction to pray with power as David did. and the conviction to pray as David did. It’s doubtless true that our greatest problem with imprecatory psalms is that the psalmist David takes sin much more seriously than we do.

The sins David took seriously are (1) praying for God’s help while living in sin—v. 6,7, (2) sins regarding the unconfessed sins of our parents when those sins show up in our lives, v. 14, (3) not remembering to show kindness, and pursuing the poor and needy and brokenhearted to help them, but seeking to put them to death—v. 16, (4) loving to curse and not delighting in blessing until like oil in the bones, a person wears cursing of others like a garment he keeps warm in, v. 17-19, (5) falsely accusing, scorning, wagging their heads at us and speaking evil of our lives, v. 20, 25. Do we see these sins as worthy of severest judgment? What was David’s view of evils? They were worthy of death, for the wages of sin is death—Romans 6: 23. Be aware that extreme as these requests were in David’s extremities, he never once took matters into his own hands. Rather, v. 14, David asks God never to forget the iniquity of this enemy’s father and he asks God not to blot out the sins of

his enemy's mother. He asks God to have his enemies' sins ever before Him—so that God cuts off the memory of this wicked man from the earth—v. 15. In v. 20, David calls on God to reward his false accusers with all the imprecations and curses of this psalm from verse 6-20—(1) a wicked defender to defend him in court, (2) for him to be found guilty, (3) for his prayers to be seen by God as sin, (4) for his days to be few, (5) for another to take his office, (6) for his children to be fatherless and his wife a widow (7) his children to be beggars, seeking food in garbage cans, (8) for creditors to seize his property and strangers take his inheritance (9) for no kindness to be shown him nor any pity to his fatherless children (10) for his posterity to be cut off in the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, (11) for the iniquity of his fathers to be ever before God and his mother's sins not forgiven (12) for him to be cut off from the earth. Though I cannot sense God's leading to so pray in light of His command to love my enemies, I do preach and acknowledge in prayer that those without God and without hope, are going to hell and in hell, will have it infinitely worse than the imprecations and calamities David prayed in Psalm 109. David's prayer will come true for the enemies of God. One last lesson:

**LET'S REMEMBER THAT OUR EXTREMITY IS GOD'S**

**OPPORTUNITY.** (III.) Notice Psalm 109 21-31. “But you, O GOD my Lord, deal on my behalf for Your name's sake; because Your steadfast love is good, deliver me! For I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me. I am gone like a shadow at evening; I am shaken off like a locust. My knees are weak through fasting; my body has become gaunt, with no fat. I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads. Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to Your steadfast love! Let them know that this is Your hand; You, O LORD, have done it. Let them curse, but You will bless! They arise and are put to shame, but Your servant will be glad! May my accusers be clothed with dishonor; may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a cloak. With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD; I will praise Him in the midst of the throng. For He stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death.” As David concludes this psalm, he is praying, “You Lord, do whatever is best. I have confidence in you. I entrust my future to You. You will give me Your best. I don't know which way to turn, but I trust You. You choose what is best for me. I am poor and needy; reach down and heal me with Your healing balm. Use my extremity as Your opportunity to show my enemy that my salvation is from Your hand alone, O Lord. You have done it. I will give great thanks to Your Lord for You still stand at the right hand of the afflicted needy ones and You will save us from those who condemn our souls to death. Save us by Your mercy. After all my prayers of giving You ideas for my enemies, Lord, You grant what is best for me and for them by Your mercy. Amen!”