

The LORD in Hiding?
Psalm 10
Pastor Jason Van Bommel

Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

² In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor;

let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.

³ For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul,

and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.

⁴ In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him;

all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

⁵ His ways prosper at all times;

your judgments are on high, out of his sight;

as for all his foes, he puffs at them.

⁶ He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved;

throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity."

⁷ His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;

under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

⁸ He sits in ambush in the villages;

in hiding places he murders the innocent.

His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;

⁹ he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket;

he lurks that he may seize the poor;

he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.

¹⁰ The helpless are crushed, sink down,

and fall by his might.

¹¹ He says in his heart, "God has forgotten,

he has hidden his face, he will never see it."

¹² Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand;

forget not the afflicted.

¹³ Why does the wicked renounce God

and say in his heart, "You will not call to account"?

¹⁴ But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation,

that you may take it into your hands;

*to you the helpless commits himself;
you have been the helper of the fatherless.*

*¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer;
call his wickedness to account till you find none.*

*¹⁶ The LORD is king forever and ever;
the nations perish from his land.*

*¹⁷ O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted;
you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear*

*¹⁸ to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.*

Intro: Sometimes We Do Ask Why, v. 1

In our series on the psalms, we have seen that the more faithful question to ask in our distress is not, “Why, Lord?” but “How long O Lord?” “How long” is the more common question of the laments in the psalms, especially when it is the psalmist himself who is suffering distress. He doesn’t cry out with a sense of entitlement, but with a humble plea for mercy, for the time of his distress to be short.

However, there are times in this fallen and broken world when we do ask why. The cry of “why” comes to the lips of the faithful more strongly when we see the innocent around us suffering grave injustice, and when we see the wicked who mock God flourishing and oppressing the poor who trust in the Lord.

God does not reject our cries of “Why, O Lord?” He gives us language like Psalm 10 for expressing ourselves faithfully in these questions, too.

Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

Notice that the cry of “Why, O LORD?” that opens Psalm 10 is not a question of arrogant unbelief, but a question of humble and confused belief in God. Behind the psalmist’s question is a belief that God is real and that God sees and that God is just. Believing in an all-seeing and just God can prompt us to ask honest and even painful questions of Him. Our questions are a confession that we don’t understand, that we don’t see all things, we don’t have all of the answers.

I’m referring to the author of Psalm 10 as “the psalmist” because we don’t know for sure who wrote this psalm. It lacks a title and has no author ascribed to it. Most scholars think it was probably written by David, but we’re not sure. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, Psalm 10 is part of Psalm 9, forming one long psalm, with David ascribed as the author. The Catholic Bibles follow this arrangement, too. However, the original Hebrew has these as two separate psalms.

A. The Arrogant Violence of the Wicked, vv. 2-11

And what has caused the psalmist such distress? The arrogant, God-denying violence of the wicked against the innocent.

- ² *In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor;
let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.*
- ³ *For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul,
and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.*
- ⁴ *In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him;
all his thoughts are, "There is no God."*
- ⁵ *His ways prosper at all times;
your judgments are on high, out of his sight;
as for all his foes, he puffs at them.*
- ⁶ *He says in his heart, "I shall not be moved;
throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity."*
- ⁷ *His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;
under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.*
- ⁸ *He sits in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places he murders the innocent.
His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;*
- ⁹ *he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket;
he lurks that he may seize the poor;
he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.*
- ¹⁰ *The helpless are crushed, sink down,
and fall by his might.*
- ¹¹ *He says in his heart, "God has forgotten,
he has hidden his face, he will never see it."*

It seems that these arrogant wicked are among the people of God, within the nation of Israel. They profess a belief in God. But they live in a bold, arrogant wickedness as if God does not really exist or does not see their actions or care what they do.

The leader of the Sudanese outreach efforts for Reaching Africa's Unreached is Joshua Abraham, who grew up as a Muslim in Darfur, Sudan. At the age of 10, he was sent to Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, to be trained to be a sheik. After a few years in school there, he left school, deciding not to become a sheik. Part of what frustrated him was the cruel racism of the Arabic Sudanese Muslims against all black Africans, including Muslim black Africans like Joshua himself.

A few years later, when Joshua went home to Darfur to visit his family, he arrived just after an attack by the Janjaweed Arabic militia. President Bashir used this militia to terrorize, slaughter and subdue the black Africans of Darfur. Over the course of their campaign of terror and genocide, they killed 200,000 to 400,000 black Africans, including many Muslims, even Muslim sheiks and imams, who were supposed to be their brothers.

Joshua could not find his family, as they had fled to the mountains to escape the Janjaweed. Thankfully, none of his immediate family were killed. He did see many who had been, and others who had been maimed by the machetes of the Janjaweed. Eventually, as the genocide continued, Joshua ended up in a refugee camp, where he heard about the love of Jesus and came to faith in Christ. Today, he preaches the Gospel and trains others to preach Christ and lead churches.

As we heard graphic details from the Darfur genocide and I then read Psalm 10, my heart ached and resounded with these words. The arrogant wicked

*“sits in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places he murders the innocent.
His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;
he lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket;
he lurks that he may seize the poor;
he seizes the poor when he draws him into his net.
The helpless are crushed, sink down,
and fall by his might.” – v. 8-10*

Of course, we know we do not need to travel to Africa to see the arrogant wicked actions of people who live as if there is no God. Right here in America, our hearts can be broken by people who sell drugs to kids or recruit kids to lives of crime, kids who get caught up in criminal activity from a young age so often die young or spend most of their adult lives in prison. Or pedophiles who prey on children, even in churches. We don't have to look very far to see rampant wickedness in our world. In fact, we see so much of it that we grow hardened to it. We know it's wrong, but we begin to get used to it, until it just doesn't bother us as much as it used to.

We can see a clear pattern with the arrogant wicked here in Psalm 10 that is repeated every day all over our world:

1. The wicked think either that there is no God, or else that God does not see what they're doing or that He doesn't really care.
2. With God out of their thoughts, they grow proud.
3. In their pride, they are driven by their selfish desires, desires to please themselves and serve their own interests and passions.
4. As they are arrogantly serving themselves, they look for weak and helpless people they can exploit and oppress, in order to get what they want.
5. And as they continue down this road of evil, convinced that God does see them, they become bold, convinced of their own invincibility.

It is important that we see and grieve over this pattern of wickedness in the world. It is very real, and God calls us to care about justice and to pray against injustice. As easy as it is to grow numb to it, we must not.

But there's another place where it's even more important for us to see this pattern of evil at work, often in quiet and insidious ways: in our own hearts! Yes, we need to look within ourselves and examine ourselves until we see that we are the arrogant wicked. How often do we live our lives as if God was not really real, or as if He didn't really see us, or perhaps as if He just doesn't really care? How often are we driven by little more than our own selfish desires, thinking only about what we want, what will make us happy, feed our appetites? Oh, but surely, we don't oppress the poor and helpless, do we? How many men secretly indulge their appetite for stimulation and pleasure, not caring about the young women who are exploited and sometimes even enslaved to provide the stimulation? And how many of us spend far more money on our personal entertainment than on missions or serving the poor? Isn't neglect a type of oppression?

And so, we see the arrogant wicked in Darfur, in Nigeria, in India, burning villages, killing the innocent. We also see the arrogant wicked in our own land. And we see the arrogant wicked when we look in the mirror. Does God see? Why does it seem so often like He's hiding?

B. Calling on God to Arise, vv. 12-15

Well, as we look at the transition from verses 2-11 to verse 12, we see the psalmist go from a lament over the arrogant wicked to crying out to God:

12 Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand;

forget not the afflicted.

13 Why does the wicked renounce God

and say in his heart, "You will not call to account"?

14 But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation,

that you may take it into your hands;

to you the helpless commits himself;

you have been the helper of the fatherless.

15 Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer;

call his wickedness to account till you find none.

This is what we need to do: Not just harden our hearts and grow numb but call out to God in faith for Him to rise up, to lift up His hand, to act in power and justice. We need to pour out our hearts in honest and earnest prayer before the Lord, and in our prayers reminding ourselves of the truth.

Here's the truth: God does see, and God does take note of the deeds of the arrogant wicked, so that He might take matters into His hands and bring about justice. The helpless commit themselves to God, and they are right to do so. As hundreds of thousands of refugees fled the Darfur genocide and the civil

war in South Sudan, they came to refugee camps in Uganda, where they were welcomed, fed, housed, and clothed, their medical needs cared for. They were shown the love of Christ by churches and missions organizations, and as they saw this new love, they entrusted themselves to God. And so churches have been planted and are growing in the refugee camps.

Very often, it is when people have all earthly helps removed that they cast themselves on the Lord, and they find Him to be their helper. He is the helper of the helpless, the father of the fatherless. While He doesn't always act in the ways we would expect or in the time we would like, He is always at work, watching, taking note, helping, and working toward justice.

Even though we trust that God is at work, we still pray and ask Him to work: "*Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none.*" And that prayer can't just be against all of the wickedness out there in the world, but it has to be against the wickedness in our own hearts, too. We must ask for God to not only remove President al-Bashir from Sudan, which He has done, or to remove his henchmen from their positions of power, but we must also pray that God would break us of our sinful arrogance and practical atheism, that He would break our hearts by His grace and reshape them to be more like Jesus.

C. The Truth About God, vv. 16-18

As we pray and call out to God, we also need to praise Him, reminding ourselves of who He is and reorienting our hearts to center on Him and His reign:

*16 The LORD is king forever and ever;
the nations perish from his land.*
*17 O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted;
you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear*
*18 to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.*

The arrogant wicked may rise to power. They may even rise to be as powerful as Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin, but they never remove God from His throne. They are never king of the universe; only God is, and He is enthroned as King of kings forever. All of the nations of men rise and fall, but His kingdom is forever.

The Lord is gracious and hears the desire of the afflicted. He is not deaf to the pleas of the helpless who call out to Him. God will do justice for the fatherless and the oppressed, and He will remove the arrogant wicked from being able to strike terror anymore.

The Truth Must Anchor our Souls

What we see in Psalm 10 is that the truth of God must anchor our souls. But even as we come to the end of Psalm 10 and the resounding words of the final section, you may still be wondering: Okay, but

how do we know that God sees and hears, and when will God act in such a definitive way that man, who is of the earth, may strike terror no more?

Well, here is where, very specifically, we must anchor our souls to the definitive answers to these questions:

1. We know for sure that God does see and does care because He sent His Son to save us, by offering up Himself in our place on the cross. On the cross, Jesus paid for the arrogant wickedness in our hearts and in the hearts of all of those who call upon Him, So, we can know that we are forgiven and will be freed from our own arrogant wickedness. But also, Jesus died to crush the one whose lies and schemes lie behind the troubling wickedness we see in the world. Jesus' death was His triumph over Satan and over the spiritual forces of wickedness. He broke them when He offered Himself up to God in our place in love. So, we know God sees and cares because He gave His one and only Son to redeem His people and crush the evil one.
2. So, when will God act decisively for justice, once-and-for-all? When Jesus returns. Jesus has promised that when He returns, He will end all evil, and He will bring all those He redeemed into the new heavens and the new earth, where justice and righteousness, peace and love will reign forever, untainted by sin and wickedness.

God has given us these double anchor points - of the cross and the Second Coming - so that we will be secure as we look back in faith on the demonstration of His love and we look forward in hope to the Great Day when all will be made new. In between these two anchor points – one in the past and one is the future – stands Christ Himself, who is the sure and steadfast anchor for our souls, seated at the right hand of the Father, ever living to make intercession for us. We cry out to Him, and through Him, we know God sees us and hears us in love for us, as our loving Heavenly Father and our Mighty God who is for us – and if God is for us in Christ Jesus, who can stand against? Let the arrogant wicked do their worst, we are kept by Christ!