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# Sermon Notes

August 12, 2018

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

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## Pray With Jesus: When You Are Outraged

Psalm 137

### Outrage

- ❖ An extremely strong reaction of anger, shock or indignation
  - what, if anything, causes you outrage?
  - many Christians may be uncertain about or even unfamiliar with the emotion of outrage
- ❖ Imprecatory psalms
  - a category of psalms that deal specifically with the emotion of outrage
  - Psalm 137, a powerful, plaintive psalm that is hard to read and even harder to come to terms with

### The Psalm's Setting

- ❖ Psalm 137 is written in response to Israel's 70 years of captivity in Babylon
  - though the exile is over, it is not yet in the distant past
  - recalling the experience of captivity brings very raw emotions to the surface

- snapshots of captivity (*cf.* Lamentations 5:2-5; 11-13)
- ❖ Israel's captors torment them by asking to sing when they have nothing to sing about
  - oppressive behavior of any kind may lead to feelings of outrage
  - this is both an ancient and a modern problem
- ❖ The psalmist vows to "never forget" what has happened to him and his fellow Jews (vv. 5-6)
  - the psalmist also calls God to REMEMBER
  - a legal term that asks God to serve as judge and to adjudicate an accusation
  - vv. 8-9 pronounce a "blessing" on those who will avenge the wrongs done to the psalmist and his countrymen
- ❖ When we are oppressed and outraged, we often may want our oppressors to suffer as we suffer and to feel our pain

### Seeking Vengeance?

- ❖ Is the author of Psalm 137 "seeking vengeance"?
  - the psalmist is not sinfully venting his feelings
  - the psalmist is appealing to God for justice, asking God to do what is right and to judge those who have been excessively wicked and cruel in their treatment of the Jews
  - the psalmist aligns himself with other well-known Bible prophecy about Edom and Babylon

- ❖ Does this psalm violate the spirit of Jesus as He prays on the cross for His enemies and teaches us to do the same?
  - would Jesus pray a prayer like this?
  - if so, can we pray this psalm WITH Jesus?
- ❖ To pray against the efforts of those who oppose God and God's cause is perfectly appropriate
  - to pray this way about personal conflict or about people or situations in which we have been personally offended may leave us on "shaky ground"
  - nowhere in the imprecatory psalms do we find anyone who wants to take revenge into his own hands
  - imprecatory prayers are always prayers for God to vindicate **His** holiness and to let **His** justice triumph
  - Romans 12:19
    - all thoughts of personal revenge must be done away with and buried at the foot of the cross
    - to pray this sort of prayer WITH Jesus means we will release our urge to "get even" and leave everything entirely in God's hands
- ❖ All of us are equally deserving of God's judgment and wrath against sin
  - the real question is not why God judges some, but rather why He chooses to save any
  - at one time, we were all enemies of God (Eph 2:12)
  - those who call on Jesus are no longer God's enemies
  - Jesus calls us His friends!

### Pray WITH Jesus

- ❖ As is the case in Jesus' prayer from the cross, our ultimate prayer is that God will be gracious to those who oppose Him and His work
  - ask God to enable them to cry out for forgiveness so that the judgment for their sin will be transferred off of them and onto Christ
  - Jesus calls those who trust in Him to follow His example by resisting and rejecting the urge to strike back
- ❖ Responding to evil with evil will cause you to be overcome by evil
  - when it is left unchecked, outrage naturally leads to bitterness
  - we should forgive in the same lavish way that we have been forgiven
- ❖ The psalms of vengeance lead us to the cross of Jesus and to the love of God that forgives enemies

### Personal Reflection

1. Can you identify anything that cause you to feel outrage? Do you think outrage is "good" or "bad"? Why?
2. How can we aspire to live at peace with everyone and yet still battle injustice?
3. Why is forgiveness crucial to praying the imprecatory psalms WITH Jesus?
4. How can we be patient and content when we don't see justice on Earth? How does knowing that the next life will be just help us develop patience now?