

PRAY FOR TRUE JUSTICE
(SUNDAY, AUGUST 20, 2023)

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 4:9-18; Psalm 58

INTRODUCTION

There are changes from what we call the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

Israel frequently faced battles in fulfillment of God's Promise of the Land.

There are legitimate times when Christians might have to take up arms, but in general we don't advance God's kingdom through physical force.

Eph. 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Worship has changed from fleshly sacrifices and songs of praise to remembering and rejoicing in the finished work of Christ along with songs of praise.

There are aspects that have not changed.

We should love God's truth and desire to walk in obedience as much as the writer of Psalm 119 did.

We saw from 2 Timothy 4 that the Apostle Paul used a prayer of imprecation against someone who opposed the spread of the gospel.

Jesus spoke very harsh words regarding those who would cause a child of God to stumble.

The Imprecatory Psalms are still for the Church of Jesus Christ to carefully consider and use to guide us in our prayers and concerns.

We can sometimes mistake passiveness for holiness.

Why did I choose this particular Psalm?

It is from Book 2 of the Psalter and is a good representative of the imprecatory Psalms.

The imagery of this Psalm is very powerful – even shocking.

In our age of evil and tolerance, these Psalms are most needed. Many think we are too good for these Psalms, but they actually show us we are too wicked.

To properly pray the words of this Psalm, we must recognize how these Psalms are the words of Jesus Christ.

In considering evil, we also must reflect on our own sin and make sure that we are washed by the blood of Christ.

Take evil seriously and pray and trust that God will judge the wicked and bring true justice.

We will follow a 3-part outline:

1. CONSIDER THE EVIL OF THOSE IN POWER, HEADING – VERSE 5

Heading

1) David – a type of Christ

2) “Do not destroy” – Psalms 57-59 share this melody.

3) Michtam?

- i) The word can mean an inscription.
- ii) LXX – stone writing. Did David write this Psalm first on the wall of a cave?
See Psalm 57.

David in 2 questions and 2 statements calls attention to those who do evil.

There are some translation questions

- i) Silent ones – NKJV
- ii) Other versions have mighty ones or rulers.¹
- iii) The context does indicate David is calling attention not to just your “ordinary” criminal; nearby Psalms and the word **judge** in verse 1.
- v) People with political power generally are the most destructive; they have great ability, often, to carry out their evil.
- v) Exceptions – mob, powerful drug cartels and gangs

David in verse 1 speaks of speech and judging uprightly.

- i) Both actions, as other versions show, are related to the exercise of political power – pronouncing just decisions, judging people fairly.
- ii) Scripture frequently reflects on the general depravity of men and women but often highlights the evil of civil rulers.
- iii) What grieved David rightfully does cause us grief and expressions of righteous anger.

David answers his two opening questions with 2 related answers in verse 2.

¹ congregation (KJV), gods (NAB, ESV, NRSV), rulers (NET, NIV), mighty ones (HCSB).

Notice how David so clearly shows that evil comes from the heart which is then expressed in a variety of actions.

The verb **weigh out** has the idea of making a way for something evil.

Evil begins in the heart. You look for ways to distribute your violence in the earth.

David further then describes the depravity of man and the hardness of the heart.

G. K. Chesterton – The doctrine of original sin is the only philosophy that has been empirically validated by thirty-five hundred years of human history.²

David speaks of how evil is not environmental but covenantal. We are born sinners.

One lexicon translates as “since conception.”

David significantly said this was also for himself.

Psa. 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

Some look at this Psalm and think, oh, it is so primitive in its theology. We are much too good to speak this way.

The reality is the opposite. **We are too evil to use this Psalm in terms of our own righteousness.**

Our first response must be thankfulness for redemption rather than the thought of how good we are.

David further shows how a rebellious heart will never be changed on its own. It is set on rebellion.

² James Boice, *Psalms*, 481.

David uses a number of powerful illustrations coming from creation – animals, plants, and people.

Verses 4 and 5 present the danger of the wicked – poison and yet totally unwilling to listen. You can skillfully charm, but all to no end.

These opening verses are key if we are going to appreciate the remainder of the Psalm.

John Calvin wrote:

Although the whole world be set against the people of God they need not fear, so long as they are supported by a sense of their integrity, to challenge kings and their counsellors, and the promiscuous mob of the people. Should the whole world refuse to hear us, we must learn, by the example of David, to rest satisfied with the testimony of a good conscience, and with appealing to the tribunal of God.

2. NOT IN OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT IN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST, WE ARE TO PRAY THAT GOD WILL JUDGE THE WICKED, VERSES 6-8

Consider the progression of images used in verses 6-8.

Five pictures of the wicked.

Boice - These images move from what is **powerful** to what is **increasingly weak**, from what is **awe inspiring** to what is merely **tragic or sad**.³

David certainly could speak first-hand in terms of these images. He didn't need to borrow them from a book of poetry.

³ Boice, 484.

What specifically does David request?

1) He requests that power of the wicked be broken.

Verse 6 – break their teeth and further smash their jawbones.

Harsh? Not when you are talking about those intent on causing harm.

2) He requests that the power of the wicked would soon fade away.

Verse 7a) NKJV translation is a bit difficult to understand.

ESV - Let them vanish like water that runs away.

3) He prays that their schemes would be frustrated.

Verse 7b, c – Versions can differ here quite significantly.

If the NKJV is the best translation – let the arrows never reach their intended target.

4) The final two images speak of the wicked being reduced to a very humble, pathetic state.

Snails obviously do not melt, but perhaps with the reference to the sun in the second part of the verse, the idea is that the snail or slug oozes and dries up as it moves along, especially under the harsh rays of the sun.

The last image is particularly not pleasant.

Better that the wicked be like this than they are able to carry out the violent plans they conspire.

The first part of this strong Psalm calls us to take evil seriously and to respond with bold prayers, not based on our own righteousness, but on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

- There is no sense here of relative righteousness.
- In the face of evil, it is evil to do nothing.

3. WE MUST NOT ONLY PRAY BUT THEN TRUST GOD WILL BRING JUDGMENT IN HIS PERFECT TIMING, VERSES 9-11

The final verses address the certainty and totality of the judgment God will bring. It speaks of vindication for God and His people.

David first speaks of the certainty of judgment expressing it in terms of its swift coming.

This is another area where the translation of this Psalm is difficult.

Versions differ but the point is the same.

Verse 9 speaks of a quick judgment (or a request for a quick judgment).

Now, this verse is a call to faith, because it doesn't always seem this way.

How many wicked men live for years without being brought to justice?

How many abortion doctors continue to practice their murder with public praise and approval?

Our government gives hundreds of millions of dollars to an organization that kills over 300,000 babies in a year. And this great evil takes place year after year after year...

Why does it seem that those with political power seem to get away for years with their evil?

The Psalms don't teach that all evil is going to be put away in visible fashion before our very eyes.

When God does act, it does as it were, come in an instant.

David further speaks of the righteous seeing the judgment brought upon the wicked.

The word vengeance is used 17x in the OT but only this time in the Psalms.

Deut. 32:35 Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in *due* time; For the day of their calamity *is* at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.'

It is the second phrase of verse 10 that is difficult for some.

Who washes his feet in the blood of the wicked?

What is the imagery here?

The word bathe or wash is a common verb, often used for washing feet.

I don't think the idea is someone taking a bath in the blood of slain soldiers.

The picture is of a victorious warrior who on the battlefield walks through the blood of his slain enemies.

Rev. 14:20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs. [184 miles]

The language of Isaiah 63 speaks of our Lord as the one who is clothed with blood of his enemies.

Derek Kidner wrote:

What might appear as ghoulishness in 10b takes on a different aspect against the rebuke of Isaiah 63:1–6, where God is appalled that none will march with him to judgment. These are warriors, not camp-followers. The New Testament will, if

anything, outside this language in speaking of the day of reckoning (e.g. Rev. 14:19f.; 19:11ff.), while repudiating carnal weapons for the spiritual war (Rev. 12:11).⁴

Finally, David speaks of a two-part recognition by men.

There is a reward for the righteous. Lit – there is fruit for the godly.

This is a beautiful statement of vindication.

This must be believed by faith, because it is often not apparent that this is the case.

One could think of the many faithful Christians who have given their life for the sake of Christ while those around them have spit on them and their graves, dug up their bones, and tried to bring shame on them even after death.

Second recognition - God does bring judgment.

There is again a question about the translation of this last phrase because of the grammar of this verse.

There is good support for what we find in the NKJV and similar translations.

Surely He is God who judges in the earth.

CONCLUSION

Take evil seriously and pray and trust that God will judge the wicked and bring true justice.

1] The imprecatory Psalms do not mean we do not pray for the salvation of the wicked and our own enemies.

⁴ Derek Kidner, *Psalms*, 228.

Psalm 83:16 Fill their faces with shame,
That they may seek Your name, O LORD.

Testimony of Stephen:

Acts 7:51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. **52** Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, **53** who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*.”

59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” **60** Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

2] We often are angry about the wickedness and injustice in our nation and around the world. There definitely is a place for righteous anger.

However, by itself, anger does not accomplish anything.

We must be directed by the Lord to godly prayer and action.

Far better to be in prayer than just stewing in your anger.

3] Jesus Christ – the one who submitted to the perfect judgment of God and will bring then perfect judgment to those who do not submit to Him.

Closing Hymn – **Psalm 58A**

BENEDICTION – HEBREWS 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.