

A JUDGE WHO JUDGES RIGHTLY

Psalm 58: 1-11 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

What a wretched world is ours. The bad guys often seem to win and God may seem to hide His holy face from it all, at least from our limited perspective. Luther Sexton put it well with a few examples from news headlines, saying, “A man kills his wife and hides her body in the back yard underneath a layer of new concrete. A woman poisons her husband and now lives lavishly on his life insurance. A police officer plants drugs in someone’s car or apartment and now they are doing time. A woman cries sexual harassment when it didn’t happen, but the man she accuses still loses his job. An elderly man is beaten and robbed, left for dead, and there are no witnesses. Children are used to peddle dope on the streets every day. A woman throws her newborn baby in a trashcan. A doctor performs abortions every day while he drives a Mercedes, and lives in a \$500,000 home, and vacations in Hawaii. You are lied to and abused by your employer since you have seniority and he has to pay you more. Then you find out as you are laid off that your boss is keeping workers with less seniority and ability. The leadership of your company has stolen all of your retirement and you must now get another job. You can’t retire like you planned. An innocent young lady is brutally abused. She was blindfolded. There are no witnesses.” The news on the radio and on television sounds dark and black and hopeless constantly.

Darkness is not an uncommon experience for God’s children. The darkness can result from our own disobedience, but it is not always necessarily so. If we run ahead of the Lord, we do so in our own shadow. Today, if any of you are running ahead of God, stop and wait for Him to lead and go before you. Whatever darkness any of us are facing, we all need the teachable spirit of the prophet Micah who said in Micah 7: 9, “I will bear the indignation/displeasure of the Lord because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon His vindication.” Micah thought he could see by faith the light at the end of the tunnel. For Job, he for quite a while could not find any answer for the darkness that enveloped him. What’s more, the reasoning and accusations of his three would-be friends only increased his darkness. Job could not seem at all to get through to seeing into God’s presence. It was just too dark. Have you ever been there with Job? In Job 23: 8-10, Job said, “Behold, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive Him; on the left hand when He is working, I do not behold Him; He turns to the right hand, but I do not see Him. But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” All Job could see in the dark was the pack horse of His knowledge of God. That knowledge of God kept him in good stead

because all he knew for sure was that though he could not see God or see through to His presence, God could see him and God would turn things around in the end for his good.

Jeremiah seems to have almost topped the charts with his darkness and despair. In Lamentations 3: 1-23, I see Jeremiah writhing in his darkness, but finally finding hope, which is what David found in Psalm 58. Jeremiah said words that seem to imply God was disciplining Him, but the fact is, what Jeremiah seems to be experiencing was the fact that he stayed with his own people, the disobedient nation of Judah who were under God's discipline. Thus, with the nation, Jeremiah was with them all, under the rod of God. He writes, "I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of His wrath; He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; surely against me He turns his hand again and again the whole day long. He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; He has broken my bones; He has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; He has made my chains heavy; though I call and cry for help, He shuts out my prayer; He has blocked my ways with blocks of stones; He has made my paths crooked. He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; He turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; He has made me desolate; He bent his bow and set me as a target for His arrow. He drove into my kidneys the arrows of His quiver; I have become the laughingstock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long. He has filled me with bitterness; He has sated (and filled) me with wormwood. He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD." "Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

Beloved, be it David, Micah, Job, Jeremiah, or me or you, darkness is not an uncommon experience. But to us all as believers, no matter how bewildered we are at the moment by the blackness of opposition, weariness and defeat, there is an awareness that our only hope is in the Lord. He is our only true light and salvation. With David, God wants to bring us to Psalm 112: 4 which says, "Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; He is gracious, merciful, and righteous." God delights to show Himself strong in our behalf. In the fourth watch of the night, He comes to us as the angel of the Lord came to the Apostle Paul when the ship Paul was on was about to sink. He speaks to us, saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand

before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.” It is not after the darkness that the Lord comes to us, it is in our darkness, that the One Himself who is Light comes to us. Psalm 58 is a treasure among all the imprecatory psalms that call down God’s vengeance on the enemies of God’s people. Among all the imprecatory psalms, this psalm is one of the strongest and bluntest and one of the most shocking. I do not believe God is calling us to respond as David did, but neither am I chiding David’s response. David was calling on God to act in His wrath against the wicked, to act swiftly, strongly, and David put the judgment of the wicked clearly into God’s hands. David was dealing with evil and those who were seeking to set aside God’s plans. David’s words are shockingly strong. Yet his desire should be our desire, faith and hope, that God will prevail.

We live in a cursed world. Too often, the bad guy gets away. But in God’s judgment, all acts will be brought to light. A just reward will someday be given. Vengeance belongs to the Lord. God will settle every account in eternity. It sounds shocking to read in Psalm 58: 10, “The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.” Can any of us even start to imagine all the wrongs that have been committed since Adam? Our courts are overflowing prosecuting cases around the clock. Our prisons are overflowing with inmates. Think of all the individuals who have committed crimes and yet they were never discovered. They lived high on stolen money. They lived and died with blood on their hands. There were no witnesses except for God. His eyes roam the earth. His ears are always listening. His angels are always recording every act on earth, good or bad. God will solve all crimes. God will judge all evil. There will be a day of court when God will settle all issues. And, because of this, we don’t have to settle them. The Scriptures say in Romans 12: 19, “Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

Whatever God’s vengeance is all about, we know from the imprecatory psalms of David, that his prayers for God to bring down His vengeance on wickedness and the wicked doesn’t begin to hold a candle to the utterly shocking wrath of God when He will finally pour it out on the wicked. Let’s learn a few lessons today from this imprecatory psalm about the way God will righteously judge the wicked. What are the take-home lessons from this psalm we must not ever forget. There are three lessons that stand out to me:

GOD WILL SETTLE EVERY ACCOUNT—EVEN THE UNRIGHTEOUS DECREES OF UNJUST JUDGES. (I.) Notice Psalm 58: 1, 2, 9 “Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the children of man uprightly? No, in your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth. . . . Sooner

than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may He (that's the Lord sweep them away!" Beloved, it won't be long until God the righteous Judge of the earth will do right. Notice in these verses, David in his darkness and despair is actually mocking unjust judges. He is comparing the titles of the judges with their works. It is as if David is saying, Judges indeed, dispensing injustice; gods indeed, yet so far removed from God." We all need to learn afresh from verse 2 that whatever the hands of ours or others do, originally the action of the hands began as what the heart first devised. What comes out in our actions, first began in our hearts. Go back with me to verse one.

This first question in Psalm 58 revolves around a word **elem**. This Hebrew word only appears here—in the Old Testament, what is known as a hapax legomena, a once used word that means dumbness or silence. This word elem is translated "you gods," or "oh congregation," or "children of men." Nobody seems to want to say what the Hebrew means. David is obviously talking about judges, but this word elem used only once is a powerful word. It means a speechless man or judge, a dumb, silent judge, literally it means to be bound and gagged as a fodder shock of corn stalks is gathered together in a shock. It can be a suitable symbol of a unjust judge who won't speak up and speak the truth or a congregation who close their eyes to truth and won't speak up for God. Whatever this means, by context, that we are examining a judicial decision that should be rendered rightly by judges, rulers or magistrates—a righteous sentence is expected. Those in judicial authority ought to pronounce a just opinion and conclusion on the conduct of those they judge. But the obvious picture is that the opposite is the case. Their verdict should rather be deemed the silence or dumbness or bound and gagged verdict of justice. It is a verdict in which justice is not declared or spoken. David is saying, "You do declare a sentence, but in the sentence, justice is silent, because of the wicked hearts of the judges. How like our judicial system often today!

David it would appear is speaking of his cause that should have been defended before King Saul. But when his case came before Saul, the advisors and counselors of Saul, who knew better, fed King Saul what he wanted. When a clear cut verdict exonerating David should have been given, they kept silence. Their very silence became the obstacle to these judges speaking righteously. Did you know, beloved, that silence can often be the equivalent of an unjust verdict? Saul's advisors were his yes men, by saying nothing to support the truth of David's character to Saul. Let me be totally clear about this silence. It is a weak silence, an abated, weakened will that decides it is not worth it to speak, for it may implicate you or me, and put us in jeopardy. In America today, 58+ million babies have been aborted since 1973. Beloved, it is time for us all to speak. One way we can speak is by doing

everything we can to support Inside Connection—the Pregnancy Resource Center. In our community, supporting the PRC may be the best way we can break the silence about the awfulness of abortion in Sweetwater County where teen pregnancies top all counties in the nation, and where abortions are rampant either in Jackson or in Salt Lake City. God wants us to break the silence.

In Germany, when the Jews were being sent to the gas chambers and being burned to ashes in the ovens, what happened in churches as the trains went by the churches and they heard the Jews screaming, they told the people to sing the hymns louder. The louder they sang, the more elem – silent they became. God hates it when we fail to stand up for truth, because it isn't popular or politically correct. Proverbs 24: 10-12 is indicting, saying, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will He not repay man according to His work?" God will settle every account, even the unrighteous decrees of unjust judges, and in our lives, the silent refusals of each of us to stand up for truth, to defend God's people when they are being falsely accused or dragged away to slaughter. Secondly,

GOD WILL SETTLE EVERY ACCOUNT BECAUSE ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD. (II) Paul states in Romans 3: 23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." David strikes a strong note here for how each of us were born—born in sin, as he says in Psalm 51: 5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Most of us like to think in our pride, at times, that that verse is true about most people, but we wiggle and squirm if the verse is supposed to be describing us. Now in Psalm 58: 3-5, David tells it like it is, and we realize, why, apart from Calvary, apart from repentance, believing and receiving Jesus, God as the righteous Judge must judge righteously and by men and women's rejection of Him, say, "Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." (Matthew 7:23) Listen to David as he describes each of us without the Lord in verses 3-5, 9. He says, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies. They have venom like the venom of a serpent, like the deaf adder that stops its ear, so that it does not hear the voice of charmers or of the cunning enchanter... Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may He (that's the Lord) sweep them away!" What does David mean in these three verses?

David is challenging the unjust judges in verses 1, 2, but now in verses 3-5, he is not attempting to influence them. He is rather speaking about them. There are depths of depravity into which unrepentant people can sink, when they arrive at the

depths of the common course of nature. Perversity starts in us from the moment of birth. From birth, we are bent to go astray. After the flood, when Noah built an altar to the Lord, we read (Genesis 8: 21) “And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Without Jesus coming into our lives, our lives quickly degenerate and decay spiritually. Without God, we all do evil as naturally as a serpent has poison beneath its tongue. We do not want to change, nor can we change. When truth hits our ears, we stop up our ears to shut out the grace and Gospel of God. Because we go astray from birth, speaking lies, we are poison to the core, and stop our ears to truth. We shut our ears and hearts to the Gospel like serpents who succeed in shutting out the words and music of men skilled in charming serpents or casting a spell upon them. Thirdly, and lastly,

GOD WILL SETTLE EVERY ACCOUNT AND WE MAY RIGHTLY LEARN TO ENTER INTO AGREEMENT WITH HIS DESIRE TO JUDGE

RIGHTEOUSLY. (III) Notice verses 7-11. “O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD! Let them vanish like water that runs away; when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted. Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime, like the stillborn child who never sees the sun. Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away. The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked. Mankind will say, “Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.” These last six verses can well be translated as prophesies and not be imprecatory—“let them be.” The Holman Christian Standard Bible, which is the Bible for the Southern Baptists translates this way. I favor this approach, but agree with either approach. Listen to the HCSB. “God, knock the teeth out of their mouths; LORD, tear out the young lions’ fangs. They will vanish like water that flows by; they will aim their useless arrows. Like a slug that moves along in slime, like a woman’s miscarried child, they will not see the sun. Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns—whether green or burning—He will sweep them away. The righteous one will rejoice when he sees the retribution; he will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. Then people will say, “Yes, there is a reward for the righteous! There is a God who judges on earth!” Yet, if we retain the picture of let them, I then can and often do enter into agreement with God against His enemies, remembering that we do not wrestle, Eph. 6: 11 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 sense a check in my spirit to ever specifically pray for any person’s demise, but I often pray Psalm 3: 7—“Smite the enemy on the cheekbone, or as here in v. 6—break his teeth out. I believe with all

my heart that God honors us when we agree with Him in praying for His righteous judgment to fall on the enemy who is fixed and unwilling to repent. As I try in my prayers to claim God's inspired authority as in the mouth of David, I pray and urge us all to pray, "Lord, do what you have to do to stop the evil forces that are causing the aborting of 1.2 million babies per year, one baby every 26 seconds. Lord, smite the forces of evil at work in America that are seeking to rob us of our Godly heritage and that are seeking to rob us of marriage as you intend it, between one man and one woman. Lord, let the forces of those who seek to destroy the family and end all marriages in divorce—make them as slow as a slug that dissolves into slime. Father, let every design of the enemy to shoot down believers' witness for you be blunted and stopped. Lord, smite the enemy and prove there is a God, one God, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who judges on the earth. Amen.