

# Summer Psalms

*Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
<sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ESV)*

## **May His Children Be Fatherless**

**September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

**Psalm 109**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 109.

Our Psalm this morning is an imprecatory Psalm – a Psalm in which David is praying down curses on his enemies. Your unbelieving neighbour can't believe that this Psalm is in your Bible. And, as I read it from the pulpit, you might find yourself struggling with the same disbelief. Charles Spurgeon wrote:

Truly this is one of the hard places of Scripture, a passage which the soul trembles to read; yet as it is a song unto God, and given by inspiration, it is not ours to sit in judgement upon it but to bow our ear to what God, the Lord, would speak to us therein.<sup>1</sup>

Amen. This Psalm will shock us, but it is from God, so let's listen with humility and expectation. Look with me to Psalm 109. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

Be not silent, O God of my praise!

<sup>2</sup> For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me,  
speaking against me with lying tongues.

<sup>3</sup> They encircle me with words of hate,  
and attack me without cause.

<sup>4</sup> In return for my love they accuse me,  
but I give myself to prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 2 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 117.

<sup>5</sup> So they reward me evil for good,  
and hatred for my love.  
<sup>6</sup> Appoint a wicked man against him;  
let an accuser stand at his right hand.  
<sup>7</sup> When he is tried, let him come forth guilty;  
let his prayer be counted as sin!  
<sup>8</sup> May his days be few;  
may another take his office!  
<sup>9</sup> May his children be fatherless  
and his wife a widow!  
<sup>10</sup> May his children wander about and beg,  
seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit!  
<sup>11</sup> May the creditor seize all that he has;  
may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil!  
<sup>12</sup> Let there be none to extend kindness to him,  
nor any to pity his fatherless children!  
<sup>13</sup> May his posterity be cut off;  
may his name be blotted out in the second generation!  
<sup>14</sup> May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord,  
and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out!  
<sup>15</sup> Let them be before the Lord continually,  
that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth!  
<sup>16</sup> For he did not remember to show kindness,  
but pursued the poor and needy  
and the brokenhearted, to put them to death.  
<sup>17</sup> He loved to curse; let curses come upon him!  
He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him!  
<sup>18</sup> He clothed himself with cursing as his coat;  
may it soak into his body like water,  
like oil into his bones!  
<sup>19</sup> May it be like a garment that he wraps around him,  
like a belt that he puts on every day!  
<sup>20</sup> May this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord,  
of those who speak evil against my life!  
<sup>21</sup> But you, O God my Lord,  
deal on my behalf for your name's sake;  
because your steadfast love is good, deliver me!  
<sup>22</sup> For I am poor and needy,  
and my heart is stricken within me.  
<sup>23</sup> I am gone like a shadow at evening;  
I am shaken off like a locust.  
<sup>24</sup> My knees are weak through fasting;  
my body has become gaunt, with no fat.  
<sup>25</sup> I am an object of scorn to my accusers;  
when they see me, they wag their heads.  
<sup>26</sup> Help me, O Lord my God!  
Save me according to your steadfast love!  
<sup>27</sup> Let them know that this is your hand;  
you, O Lord, have done it!

- <sup>28</sup> Let them curse, but you will bless!  
They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad!
- <sup>29</sup> May my accusers be clothed with dishonor;  
may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a cloak!
- <sup>30</sup> With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord;  
I will praise him in the midst of the throng.
- <sup>31</sup> For he stands at the right hand of the needy one,  
to save him from those who condemn his soul to death. (Psalm 109:1-31 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

What are we supposed to do with a Psalm like this? We know that all Scripture is breathed out by God, so we know that the Holy Spirit gave this Psalm to us. But why? Spurgeon notes:

It must be right or it would not be here, but how, we cannot see. Why should we expect to understand all things? Perhaps it is more for our benefit to exercise humility, and reverently worship God over a hard text, then it would be to comprehend all mysteries.<sup>2</sup>

That's a helpful word for us before we go any further. As we find ourselves shocked and perplexed, let's resolve to adopt a posture of humility and reverence. As we wrestle with this text, IT should pin US to the mat.

We're going to begin with a brief survey of the Psalm itself, but then – due to the way that this text so uniquely challenges us – we will dedicate most of our time to the questions of application.

## Surveying the Psalm

In the opening verses we find:

### 1. A cry for help

Look with me again at verses 1-5:

Be not silent, O God of my praise!

<sup>2</sup> For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me,

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 2 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 121.

speaking against me with lying tongues.  
<sup>3</sup> They encircle me with words of hate,  
and attack me without cause.  
<sup>4</sup> In return for my love they accuse me,  
but I give myself to prayer.  
<sup>5</sup> So they reward me evil for good,  
and hatred for my love. (Psalm 109:1-5 ESV)

Commentators agree that this Psalm was likely written after one of two crises in David's life. It was either written after David's closest counsellor, Ahithophel, assisted David's son Absalom in his mutiny,<sup>3</sup> or it was written after David was betrayed by Doeg the Edomite. We're not entirely sure which betrayal it was, but I think it would be helpful to zoom in on one of these stories so that we can feel something of the weightiness of what David was responding to.

We find the story of Doeg in 1 Samuel 22 – in fact we read it this past week in the RMM reading plan. David had been set apart by God as the future King of Israel. However, this prophecy was made while Saul was still on the throne. David would never overthrow the King, but Saul was fearful, and he decided to snuff out the threat. Loyal, humble David was forced to flee for his life.

As he fled, he stopped at a city called Nob where he ran into a priest named Ahimelech. The priest had no idea that David was fleeing from the King. David was a valiant soldier for Saul, and he would have stopped in at Nob on many of his military expeditions. Hungry and tired, David asked for some bread and for Goliath's sword – a request that Ahimelech was happy to meet. A man named Doeg happened to be in Nob at the time, and he reported this event to Saul. Doeg, Saul and the army of Israel paid the city a visit, at which point Saul turned to Doeg and said:

“You turn and strike the priests.” And Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod. <sup>19</sup> And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; **both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep, he put to the sword.** (1 Samuel 22:18b-19 ESV)

Because of Doeg's malicious report to the King, the men, women, children and infants of Nob were mercilessly murdered. We believe THAT story is the context for this Psalm. David is heartbroken and horrified. He likely waved and made faces at some of the kids in the city as he

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<sup>3</sup> See 2 Samuel 15-16.

rode out with his army. And now, he receives the report that for no good reason they were all slaughtered. That leads us to the most challenging section of the Psalm where we find:

## 2. A plea for justice

In verses 6-8, David prays:

- <sup>6</sup> Appoint a wicked man against him;  
let an accuser stand at his right hand.  
<sup>7</sup> When he is tried, let him come forth guilty;  
let his prayer be counted as sin!  
<sup>8</sup> May his days be few;  
may another take his office! (Psalm 109:6-8 ESV)

If you've been tracking with us over the last few months, then you should recognize verse 8. Peter quoted it in Acts 1 and applied it to Judas. In one sense, then, David was writing *prophetically* here of the justice that would rain down on the one who betrayed the truly innocent sufferer.

But this isn't just a prophecy pointing forward. First and foremost, this is a prayer that David really prayed about his present circumstances. And at the heart of this Psalm lies David's deep longing for justice – the kind of justice that God mandated in His Law. David was longing for Leviticus 24:17-20 where we read:

Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death.<sup>18</sup> Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life. <sup>19</sup> If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him. (Leviticus 24:17-20 ESV)

The Israelites were living in a society that was governed by God's Law and God had revealed in His word that the wicked should be repaid in kind for the wicked things that they had done. Eye for eye. Tooth for tooth. Life for life. No more, and no less. THAT was the standard for justice in Israel and THAT is what David is asking for here. You see it all throughout his prayer:

- <sup>6</sup> Appoint a wicked man against him;  
**let an accuser stand at his right hand.** (Psalm 109:6 ESV)

<sup>16</sup> For he did not remember to show kindness,  
but pursued the poor and needy  
and the brokenhearted, to put them to death.

<sup>17</sup> He loved to curse; **let curses come upon him!**  
He did not delight in blessing; **may it be far from him!** (Psalm 109:16-17 ESV)

David is saying, “God, you are just, and you see what has happened! When will his evil fall back on his own head? You were there when Doeg betrayed me! You saw! A priest gave my men some bread and, as a result, they killed the entire city?! He executed children, Lord!! Infants! And for what – a pat on the back from the king? CURSE HIM! CURSE HIM TO HELL!” As one commentator notes:

The passages on which we may be tempted to sit in judgement have the shocking immediacy of a scream, to startle us into feeling something of the desperation which produced them.<sup>4</sup>

I think that’s a fair description of what this Psalm is. It’s like a scream of desperation rising from an unimaginable pain. That is certainly the case in verses 9-13 – arguably the most shocking verses in the Psalter – where David prays:

<sup>9</sup> May his children be fatherless  
and his wife a widow!

<sup>10</sup> May his children wander about and beg,  
seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit!

<sup>11</sup> May the creditor seize all that he has;  
may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil!

<sup>12</sup> Let there be none to extend kindness to him,  
nor any to pity his fatherless children!

<sup>13</sup> May his posterity be cut off;  
may his name be blotted out in the second generation! (Psalm 109:9-13 ESV)

Wow. Even if David DID write this Psalm fresh after receiving the report of all the children who were slaughtered – it still feels wrong to our modern ears, doesn’t it? And yet, Charles Spurgeon would have us question our inconsistency with this response. He asks:

Who mourns that Pharaoh’s children lost their father or that Sennacherib’s wife became a widow?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72 TOTC*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Treasury of David - Third Ed. Vol. 2 of 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 120.

Have you ever grieved for Adolf Hitler's children? Or Pol Pot? Or Charles Manson? We don't allow our minds to follow the consequences that far down the line, do we? We applaud that justice was done, but we take no stock of the fact that the justice impacts the whole family.

But justice DOES impact the whole family. Because *injustice* impacts the whole family. These wicked men ruined whole families, and David is praying that their whole families would be ruined in turn. Eye for an eye. No more, and no less. In David's estimation, there could be no true justice any other way.

But, before we move on, I want to make sure we see that even in the depth of David's anger, he knows that he cannot take justice into his own hands. He lays out his heart, but he leaves it with God because he knows that God will do what is right. In verse 27, he prays:

<sup>27</sup> Let them know that this is your hand;  
you, O Lord, have done it! (Psalm 109:27 ESV)

YOU have done it. Not David. God. As fiery as this Psalm is, it isn't a check list of things that *David is going to do* in retaliation. It is a wish list of things that David believes *God ought to do* in meting out justice.

And having poured out his painful request for justice, David concludes his prayer with:

### **3. A declaration of praise**

This dark Psalm – oddly enough – is bookended with praise. In verse 1, we read:

Be not silent, O God of my praise! (Psalm 109:1 ESV)

One of the ways that this Psalm should stretch us is the way in which God's justice *fuels* David's worship! He's not embarrassed by this theme. On the contrary, in Psalm 109, God's justice is the reason David sings! And so, after crying out for help and pleading for mercy he declares:

With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord;  
I will praise him in the midst of the throng.  
<sup>31</sup> For he stands at the right hand of the needy one,  
to save him from those who condemn his soul to death. (Psalm 109:30-31 ESV)

In a world filled with unrighteousness – a world filled with oppressors, abusers, slanderers and swindlers – there is a righteous Judge who never misses a thing.

He stands at the right hand of the needy. He fights for the cause of the oppressed. He judges with absolute perfection. And He never misses a thing. Therefore, even though David has suffered terrible injustice, he can begin and end this fiery Psalm with praise.

That's what the Psalm says, but the biggest challenge before us this morning is application. I want to ask two questions before we conclude. First:

### **Why Did God Give Us This Psalm?**

You know this, but let me remind you again: The Psalms were given to us BY GOD. They were written by holy men who were taught by the Holy Spirit. Which means, we can't simply write this Psalm off just because it offends our North American ears. On the contrary, the fact that it offends us is all the more reason why we NEED it! This Psalm is teaching us something that we aren't hearing anywhere else.

God didn't give us this Psalm to embarrass us. He didn't give us this Psalm as an example of "how NOT to pray." Well then, why DID he give us this Psalm? I would propose at least two reasons. First, God gave us this Psalm:

#### **1. To give voice to the plight of the oppressed**

In the same way that we have Psalms that give voice to grief, and hope, and fear, and adoration, this is a Psalm that gives voice to righteous anger. As a person who often struggles with bouts of deep discouragement, I am thankful that I can turn to the Psalms and remember that my God understands me, and even gives me a prayer to pray. I need that.



But what about the woman whose innocence was stolen from her by a sexual predator? What about the Ukrainian widow who kissed her son and her grandsons goodbye as they stayed home to protect their people from the incoming invasion? What about the police officer who just walked into a crime scene where he witnessed the kind of evil that I won't even allude to in a context like this? Does God understand THAT kind of pain? Is there a Psalm that gives vent to THAT kind of hurt?

Yes. There is.

We are tempted to mute these notes of anger. We're tempted to downplay God's justice. We think we're nicer than God. We give ourselves permission to soften His hard edges. But in our "kindness" we edit the truths that hurting people need to hear. R.C. Sproule is right when he says:

If we despise the justice of God, we are not Christians... a loving God who has no wrath is no God. He is an idol of our own making as much as if we carved him out of stone.<sup>6</sup>

The problem with manufacturing a God that looks just like me is that the world is facing problems that I can't even begin to comprehend. The God of my own imagination may prove sufficient to cheer me up when I've been too hard on myself, but the persecuted church in Afghanistan – the family whose father was just beheaded – they need the God of the Bible!

God gave us this Psalm to give voice to the plight of the oppressed and, flowing out of that, He gave us this Psalm:

## **2. To affirm that God cares about justice – and we can too**

I watched the sermon from two weeks ago and I suspect that many people in this room felt a bit uncomfortable as our brother Gary slammed his fist on the pulpit. As he reflected on the injustices that are being perpetrated all around us, he felt a righteous anger. I felt it too.

There is no shortage of injustice in the world, and we are not meant to be indifferent about it. Innocent people are accused. Guilty people go free. Children are ransomed. Judges are bribed.

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<sup>6</sup> R.C. Sproule, *The Holiness of God*, (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2010), 216-217.

Boys and girls are enslaved. The unborn are killed. If the Bible doesn't have anything to say about the reality of injustice that we see all around us, then **why should anyone waste their time reading it?** If the preacher has never slammed his fist on the pulpit with tears in his eyes, then one wonders whether that preacher has ever taken an honest look at the world!

In this Psalm, David's eyes are wide open! He has just witnessed unthinkable injustice! But PRAISE GOD, he knows where he can bring his complaint!

Psalm 109 makes comfortable, coddled Christians like me grimace, but that is exactly what I need! I need to remember that the Gospel IS good news for the oppressed. I need to remember that God DOES care about justice – and therefore, so should I.

But that leads me to ask one concluding question:

### **How Do We Pray This Psalm Today?**

Before I give you my answer, I want to disclose to you that there is a lot of disagreement here. There are people I respect who are unreservedly praying this prayer in their private devotions about Vladimir Putin. There are others whom I respect who think that – if we prayed this Psalm verbatim – we would be praying in disobedience to the teaching of Jesus. I am convinced of my position, but I'm a fallible person, so I wanted to let you know that good folks disagree with me. So, how do we pray this Psalm today?

### **Carefully and sparingly with an eye to the cross**

Believe it or not, we DO find New Testament examples of prayer like this. In fact, we catch a glimpse of this longing for justice in the closing pages of the Bible. Listen to the prayer of the martyrs who were slain for their faith:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. <sup>10</sup> They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, **how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"** (Revelation 6:9-10 ESV)

That's a prayer that's being prayed IN HEAVEN RIGHT NOW! We find a similar prayer in 2 Thessalonians 1 where Paul rejoices that those who persecute the saints will one day stand before the judgement seat of God.

So, we CAN pray a prayer like this.

But we should pray it carefully. David was God's appointed King, and the opposition against him was essentially opposition against God. When David prayed this prayer, he *knew that he was in the right*. Don't pray a prayer like this unless you *know that you are in the right*. Are you sure that it isn't your sin that has motivated this prayer? Are you sure that you have a grasp of the whole story? Are you sure that you're on the right side of this confrontation? Use this prayer carefully.

And we should pray it sparingly. This isn't the kind of prayer that you pray when someone steals your parking spot. This isn't the kind of prayer that you pray when your boss publicly embarrasses you. This is the kind of prayer that you pray after a GENOCIDE. Don't pray this prayer against your spouse after your fight about the dishes. This isn't that. This is a prayer for the deepest, darkest injustices that are endured in this broken world. So, use it sparingly.

And finally, if you're praying a prayer like this, then make sure that your eyes are fixed on the cross.

David was *right* to pray this prayer living as he did under the Old Covenant and knowing what he knew about God's justice. But we live under the NEW Covenant, and we know MORE than David did, so we're going to sing this song in a different key.

Some things will be the same. Our longing for justice is the same. Our anger at injustice is the same. Our surrender to God's perfect judgement is the same.

So, what has changed then?

The cross.

You see, in the Old Covenant, there was NO WAY that justice could be satisfied unless a commensurate pound of flesh was taken from the guilty party. Someone had to pay! That's what the Law said! God had declared that justice demanded "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth" so David pleaded with God on those terms.

But we have been given an even deeper understanding of how we are to understand God's law. Jesus taught us:

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' <sup>39</sup> **But I say to you**, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matthew 5:38-39 ESV)

How could that be? What could have possibly changed, that we would be enabled to overlook injustice? Is God less committed to righteousness in the New Covenant? Has He changed? No, but as the Apostle Paul explains:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested **apart from the law**, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it (Romans 3:21 ESV)

David appealed to God's Law, but Paul tells us here that there is a place where we can see a CLEARER picture of the righteousness of God. Paul directs our attention to the cross and says:

**This was to show God's righteousness**, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:25b-26 ESV)

From the dawn of creation to the end of time, every person who has or will put their trust in Jesus can look to the cross and see God's righteous and holy wrath poured out against sin. Nothing was missed! Therefore, while the Law taught us "an eye for an eye", Jesus teaches us:

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44 ESV)

You can only obey that command if you understand the cross. Look at the price that Jesus paid – it is sufficient to cover your sins! But do you believe that it is also sufficient to cover the sins of your enemy? Well then pray for them. Pray that they would be humbled. Pray that they would repent.

Pray that God would demonstrate His justice by punishing their heinous sin in Christ's body on that cross. Pray that – should he bring them to a place of repentance – that you would find solace in the fact that the cross was enough.

Now, this isn't to say that they won't experience earthly consequences. The Israelites lived under the Law of Moses and were punished according to its laws. We live under our own governments and the gospel doesn't free us from the just consequences of the law. The king does not wield the sword in vain as per Romans 13. There are legal, earthly consequences for sin, and we praise God for that. However, earthly consequences aside, we are called to surrender our *deepest longing for justice* to God. And at the cross that justice has been satisfied.

But what about the justice that is not displayed on the cross? What about my enemies who never put their trust in Jesus? Well, the Bible reminds us that God will deal justly with their sin as well.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. **And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done...** <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-12,15 ESV)

God is infinitely more committed to justice than you are. Every single sin – every single injustice – will be held to account. Nothing has been missed. Nothing will be missed. As Paul assures us in Romans 12:

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (Romans 12:19 ESV)

So, like David, grieve injustice. Bring that anger to the Lord. Call upon Him to issue the justice which He has promised. Pray that prayer carefully. Pray that prayer sparingly. And only pray that prayer with eyes that are fixed on the cross. To that end, let's pray together.