

Mourning our Wickedness: Psalm 10

(Lay out pages of the newspaper and read the headlines)

Why, Lord, do you stand far off?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1)

Has anyone here felt like asking that recently? I have. Every time I read the news. Whether it's about politics, economics, natural disasters, wars that just go on and on...why doesn't God DO something about all this? I don't understand why he's let it get this bad, why he's allowing so many people to suffer.

In Psalm 10, the writer is crying out to God in anger and frustration because of a "wicked man" who is rejecting God and attacking the innocent. It could be describing one particular man, but I think it's more likely that this psalm is a lament about the wickedness of humanity in general, and the "wicked man" represents the depth of wickedness that we are capable of. It's a caricature of evil.

So what are the characteristics of wickedness that are listed here? What terrible things does the wicked man do? We're going to make a list. I want you to tell me all the actions the wicked man takes in this psalm, in verses 2-11 (You will need to use a pew Bible, or your bible app). Look for the verbs, the action words, or the characteristics of this man. What is he like, and what does he do?

(list on flip chart: "The Wicked Man. What is he like? What does he do?")

Ex. Verse 2 – arrogant, hunting the weak, scheming

-ambush, lying in wait, attacking, murdering

-pride, boasting, overconfidence

- craving, greedy

-lying, threatening

-secrecy

-strong, prosperous

-harms the weak/innocent/helpless

-wrong beliefs about God, reviles/rejects God, no room for him

There we are. God has allowed all of this evil, and done nothing to stop it. How can he let this person, or people, treat him and others this way? Isn't he a God of justice and compassion?

The psalmist believes so, and so he tells God what he should do in verses 12-15:

Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God.

Do not forget the helpless.

¹³ Why does the wicked man revile God?

Why does he say to himself,

“He won't call me to account”?

¹⁴ But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;

you consider their grief and take it in hand.

The victims commit themselves to you;

you are the helper of the fatherless.

¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked man;

call the evildoer to account for his wickedness

that would not otherwise be found out.

That sounds like justice, doesn't it? God should wake up, “arise” and see the pain of the victims, and help them. He should punish this wicked person.

Break his arm! Break the power he has over people, and then call him to account, judge him for all these evil actions. Prove him wrong in his belief that he will never be caught, never be made to face the consequences of his actions. Lock him up! Make him suffer! Do to him what he's done to others! Make him pay!

That's what the psalmist wants, and that's what we want when we see wicked people hurting others and getting away with it. Retributive justice: punish those offenders! There are a lot of psalms like this in the Bible. Technically

they're called the imprecatory psalms: C.S. Lewis calls them the "cursings." I like that better. We're cursing the bad guys and calling down God's judgment upon them. We've got righteous indignation at the injustice of it all.

But we have a problem: Psalm 10 sounds nothing like the way of Jesus. Jesus didn't teach or practice retributive justice. In fact, if we put just a small portion of the Sermon on the Mount next to Psalm 10, it's pretty hard to believe they're both part of the Bible.

Matthew 5:38-48

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus calls us to a better ethic than repaying "an eye for an eye." He commands us to love our enemies and pray for those who oppress us. Now, praying for them I could do. I'll just pray Psalm 10! Done.

But that's not what Jesus meant. He clarifies his command to pray for them by giving the example of how God blesses everyone on earth with sunshine and rain. He provides for all, even the ones who hate him and harm others. He wants us to pray for our enemies in that same spirit, a spirit of love and mercy

and blessing. How on earth are we going to do that? I don't want to do that! I don't want my enemies to be blessed and shown mercy.

We're going to look at three keys that will help unlock our hearts to love our enemies. The first key is found in one basic virtue. One godly characteristic that the wicked never have. In fact, none of us have very much of it. It starts with an H. Can anyone guess? The key is humility.

Humility says, I am not better than anyone else on this earth. I am not better than the cashier or the garbage collector or the waiter who serves me. I am not better than my parents or my spouse or my children. I am not better than my co-workers or my fellow students. I am not better than my boss or my teacher or my landlord. I am not better than immigrants from other countries. I am not better than my elected officials. I am not better than my enemies. I am not better than the current US President ...

Now wait just a minute! That's where my heart rebels, and maybe yours does too. The president is a known adulterer, a criminal, a liar, and a racist. Surely I'm better than he is, right? That's just an objective fact.

Well, in one sense, yes, and in another sense, no. Let's look at this list again. Can any of us read this list and honestly say that we've never behaved in ANY of these ways?

I can't. I know I've done some of the things on this list. I've been proud, I've lied, I've held wrong beliefs about God, I've been greedy. Have I done the same amount of those things as some of our political leaders? Maybe not – but it doesn't matter. Because Jesus says here that we are to compare our behaviour with God's to see if we measure up. We don't compare our behaviour with other people's. Only God is the standard. **“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

If you are looking for a perfect gemstone – does it matter whether the diamond has a small black speck in it, or a big crack? No. They both get rejected as imperfect. So if we're all gemstones sitting in the discard pile together, does it make any sense to start organizing ourselves by degree of imperfection? Can

we say, we'll this one's worse, so I'm actually ok? No! If we hope the bad guys will be judged...we better be careful, because we're all in the bad guy category. None of us are the good guys! Jesus stands alone with that title.

I love how Paul puts it in Romans 2:1-4 -

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. (gesture to flip chart)

²Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

That's the second key to this mystery of how to love our enemies. **The first key is humility, realizing that we're all in the same boat together as sinners. The second key is understanding how repentance works.** How we actually get people to turn away from evil.

It's receiving kindness that leads people to repentance. Judging, condemning, criticizing, threatening, punishing...none of that softens a person's heart or inspires them to change. But kindness, forbearance and patience cause a person to reflect on themselves. **"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Prov 15:1**

Sarah Grace and I were laughing in the car the other day at an imaginary scenario where Mr. Rogers was still alive, and called up the President. Can you imagine? I wonder if anyone has ever spoken to him the way that Mr. Rogers spoke to people. *"Isn't it a lovely day to be together? You are special, and I like you. Won't you be by neighbour?"* Maybe the President would be a different sort of person if he had watched Mr. Roger's show as a kid, or if someone had shown him mercy when he was at his lowest.

So when it comes to how we treat our enemies, Rom 12:18-20 says,

¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." (quote from Prov 25:21-22)

It's our job to love one another, to show radical kindness that might just change our enemies' hearts. It's God's job alone to judge. **That's the third key in loving our enemies: trusting God to deal with them.** Jesus didn't give us the job of fixing the world and all the people in it – we're just supposed to love people. We are to repay good for evil, to bless those who persecute us, to forgive those who don't deserve it, to pray for mercy for people who are more wicked than we are. That's what Jesus did on the cross.

He prayed, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34) In the very moment that he was dying at the hands of his bullies, he showed that he loved them by praying for mercy for them.

And in case we think that was only something Jesus should do, we have the example of Stephen, the first Christian martyr after Jesus, who prayed the same thing in Acts 7:59-60.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

This is the exact opposite of Psalm 10. The psalmist prays, "Arise Lord! Break the arm of the wicked man! Call the evildoer to account!"

But both Jesus and Stephen demonstrate a different way. They were humble, not proud. They understood that condemnation and punishment wouldn't change anyone – it was love and kindness that would lead to repentance. And

they left the judging to God, trusting in his justice, his timing, his ability to deal with the rebellion of his own creatures.

So why is Psalm 10 in the Bible at all then? And all these other psalms that curse our enemies and pray for their defeat? At least 2 reasons: they validate our longing for justice, and they remind us whose side God is on – the side of the victim, the weak, the helpless, the afflicted. The end of Psalm 10, verses 16-18 say this:

The Lord is King for ever and ever;

the nations will perish from his land.

¹⁷ You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted;

you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,

¹⁸ defending the fatherless and the oppressed,

so that mere earthly mortals

will never again strike terror.

Psalm 10 is not a good example of how to pray for our enemies. But it is a good reminder that God owns the world. He is in control, he is the king forever, not the wicked leaders who seem to have so much power. They are all going to perish. But God and his justice will endure.

And it's a reminder that God hears the cry of the oppressed, he will defend them, and he will bring down the proud. There will come a day when "mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror." That is a precious hope! When God's kingdom has come on earth as it is in heaven, things won't be the way they are now. There will be a day when we have no more enemies, when God has set all things right. We can rejoice in that knowledge, even as we mourn the current state of the world and the wickedness we see all around us. It won't always be this way. We can take heart, and continue to do our little acts of love for God and others. We don't have to fix the world – God will fix it. We just need to continue on being humble, showing kindness to our enemies, and trusting in God.

And we can praise God that he has the opportunity to show us just how merciful and good he is. Here is a thought-provoking quote from A.W. Tozer for us to end with:

“As judgment is God’s justice confronting moral inequity, so mercy is the goodness of God confronting human suffering and guilt. Were there no guilt in the world, no pain and no tears, God would yet be infinitely merciful; but his mercy might well remain hidden in his heart, unknown to the created universe. No voice would be raised to celebrate the mercy of which none felt the need. It is human misery and sin that call forth the divine mercy.” (A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy)

If there were no wickedness in the world, we might never have seen God’s mercy and forgiveness in action. That doesn’t mean wickedness is good – it just means God is good, and we are blessed to be able to experience it, to be forgiven, to be shown mercy. When we are able to grasp how much mercy we’ve been shown, it will be easier to pray for our enemies to be shown mercy as well.

Let’s pray.