

# The Purpose of Imprecatory Psalms

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Well, I'm glad to welcome you all again this evening as we gather around God's word once more at Truth Community Church. That's what we like to do. That's what we do and Tuesday nights, we've been studying through the Psalms and we've come to Psalm 69 and we're doing some preparatory studies before we actually go through that Psalm verse by verse, a study on what's called the imprecatory Psalms that we started last week, and to begin our time, let's turn to Psalm 69:22 and just to kind of remind ourselves of the tone of some of these passages of Scripture. Psalm 69, beginning in verse 22, David praying about his enemies as they existed at that time said,

22 May their table before them become a snare; And when they are in peace, may it become a trap. 23 May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, And make their loins shake continually. 24 Pour out Your indignation on them, And may Your burning anger overtake them. 25 May their camp be desolate; May none dwell in their tents. 26 For they have persecuted him whom You Yourself have smitten, And they tell of the pain of those whom You have wounded. 27 Add iniquity to their iniquity, And may they not come into Your righteousness. 28 May they be blotted out of the book of life And may they not be recorded with the righteous.

Now, as we said last week, we want to wrestle with the difficult question of the place that these kinds of Psalms have in the biblical canon and in biblical ethics. I would encourage you to pick up last week's message if you didn't hear it because we addressed it from kind of a global perspective about the nature of the Old and the New Testament as it would inform our understanding of these Psalms, and I don't have time to repeat all of that material here, but we said the totality of Scripture would caution us against rendering harsh judgments against the biblical writer, and that is kind of where we started. We quoted from C. S. Lewis, who said that among other things he accused such Psalms as being devilish, of being written by petty and vindictive men, and we wanted to come to grips with some of that.

Well, let's just remind ourselves up front that we do not join with the critics of God's word. We do not stand in judgment of the Bible. The Bible stands in judgment of us, and when something seems difficult, we need to slow down and try to understand what it's saying and the spirit of what is being said, rather than running to quick conclusions where

we would find ourselves in opposition to God's word. That's not a good place for anyone to be. So we do not join the critics but we want to address the question earnestly at the same time. And I agree, our church agrees, with the sentiments of S. Lewis Johnson who said this, the former pastor and theologian from Dallas who is now with the Lord, he said and I quote, "Many Christians are disturbed by the imprecatory Psalms. They hear the psalmists asking God to curse individuals and to destroy them and even destroy their children. That has proved troubling to many Christians." And he goes on to say this, "It is one of the illustrations of the fact that we don't always have the same spirit that God has, and we need to learn and grow so that our spirit becomes more identifiable with his Spirit." In other words, if we find something that seems very foreign to us in God's word, the likely need is for us to grow spiritually, to grow in our understanding, to grow in our priorities and affections, rather than the fact that the Bible would need to catch up with us in our supposedly enlightened state. So we want to work through these things, not denying the difficulty of the question but trying to come to grips with it.

Now, many authorities in trying to answer this difficulty, will assert that what you read in the imprecatory Psalms is merely a poetic vividness that goes beyond the literal intent in the words used, so he's just using exaggerated language to make his point. So for an English equivalent, this is a very rough and kind of a crude example but one that I think we all could agree with, you might know a man who is angry with someone who would say something like this, or a woman, I've heard women speak this way, not within my immediate family in my home here in Kentucky, but an English equivalent might be, "You know, I could just break his neck." Now, there is a certain poetic expression to that. That's not a godly thing to say, let me make that plain right up front, but my point, my only point here for now is that when someone says something like that, that's not a statement of conscious intent on their part, that they are literally going to go and snap vertebrae from vertebrae in order to exact their revenge upon the person. They are simply expressing anger. They are simply giving voice to a picture that would say, "I am really angry with that person," without stating that they intend to go and render him a quadriplegic. That's not the intent of the language like that, and in like manner, some commentators, many commentators will say that's what you see going on in the imprecatory Psalms; that it's just exaggerated language that is fitting with the style of the culture of the time.

Now, that's not an unreasonable position for someone to take. There are elements of that in Scripture. If you would turn over to Jeremiah 20 just to see some poetic vividness that goes beyond literal intent, in Jeremiah 20:15, Jeremiah actually in verse 14, Jeremiah is speaking from deep discouragement and he says in verse 14, Jeremiah 20:14, he says,

15 Cursed be the man who brought the news To my father, saying, "A  
baby boy has been born to you!" And made him very happy. 16 But let  
that man be like the cities Which the LORD overthrew without relenting,  
And let him hear an outcry in the morning And a shout of alarm at noon;  
17 Because he did not kill me before birth, So that my mother would have  
been my grave, And her womb ever pregnant. 18 Why did I ever come

forth from the womb To look on trouble and sorrow, So that my days have been spent in shame?

Deep, profound discouragement, but I don't believe that he's actually wishing that the man who delivered him actually had instead been an abortionist. He is simply using vibrant expressive language in order to arrest the attention of the reader to the depth of the discouragement of his soul.

Now, that may explain some of what we see in the imprecatory Psalms, that there is just a poetic vividness to it, but to me it's not a satisfying answer in the end. It's not a complete answer. It's not a comprehensive answer. It doesn't bring us into what I believe is more of the heart of these imprecatory Psalms as you can see as you examine them in context. And here's what I want to lay before you tonight: is that the psalmists in these imprecatory Psalms have very profound spiritual purposes in mind. They have spiritual goals that are being expressed in what they write, and when we understand and see in the context what those purposes are, we start to realize something that is very humbling in my opinion that I think you will find by the end of our time together tonight. You see, we find that men look down on these imprecatory Psalms as being unfit for human consumption, unfit for godly people to consider or to have ever written. The truth of the matter is, I believe, that when you start to see the themes that we're going to see tonight, you're going to find that we actually shrink in our self-estimation about our own spiritual condition in light of the zeal of godliness that is expressed in these kinds of Psalms. So that's what I want to try to show you here this evening to give us another perspective to look at these Psalms and to look at the psalmist sympathetically, and to ask ourselves some penetrating questions about whether the nobility that is expressed in these Psalms are actually live and vibrant impulses in our own spiritual lives, and you'll see what I mean as we go along.

What is the purpose behind the imprecatory Psalms? Well, we're going to look at four different aspects of them; not every aspect true and evident in every single imprecatory Psalm, but we are looking at them as a whole. First of all, dealing with Psalm 69, in particular, what do you find motivating the heart of the psalmist in these texts? Point 1: the glory of God. The glory of God. Sometimes when you are reading these Psalms, you find that the psalmist is preoccupied to defend and see vindicated the glory of God in the situation that he is dealing with.

So look at Psalm 69:7, the preceding context to the passage that I read at the beginning. Look at what David says here in Psalm 69:7. He says,

7 Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Dishonor has covered my face. 8 I have become estranged from my brothers And an alien to my mother's sons.

Why? Why this estrangement from his relatives, from those close to him and his family? He says in verse 9,

9 For zeal for Your house has consumed me, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.

Now, when we read this Psalm as a whole, we should always remember, as we said last week, David is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He is speaking truth about what truly animates his heart as he is writing this Psalm, and as he is writing this Psalm, he says, "Your glory is what I am agitated about as I write here. Zeal for you, zeal for your name, zeal for your house is consuming me. It is eating at me. I long to see you receive the glory that you deserve. I long to see men honor you and ascribe glory to you as your name so richly deserves, and yet I find that that's not what is happening, and the disparity between what I know you deserve and what men ascribe to you is something that is gnawing at my soul. I can't handle it. I must give voice to it. I must express it to you, O God, in what I have to say." So as he's writing, God's glory is his focus.

Now, let's step back and just ask a question from a biblical perspective, asking a question not caring a whit for the moment what any human being thinks about these Psalms. Let's look at this and ask the question from God's perspective. Is God's glory, is zeal for God's glory a noble purpose to animate what's going on in a person's heart? The answer to that question is clearly yes. That is a noble focus. That is a noble end. That is a noble purpose for a man to write, for a man to have animating his prayers.

Turn over to Psalm 79:8 where you see a similar combination of these themes. Psalm 79:8 where the psalmist writes in verse 8, let's go to verse 6 where he says,

6 Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You, And upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Your name. 7 For they have devoured Jacob And laid waste his habitation.

So he's asking God to pour out his wrath on the nations which came against his people. Then in verse 8 he says,

8 Do not remember the iniquities of our forefathers against us; Let Your compassion come quickly to meet us, For we are brought very low. 9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name;

Do you see it again? "God, as I'm praying for wrath to be brought on these nations, remember that I am praying for the glory of your name and asking you to help us and deliver us and forgive our sins. For your name's sake, your glory, your name." In verse 10 he says,

10 Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let there be known among the nations in our sight, Vengeance for the blood of Your servants which has been shed. 11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; According to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are doomed to die. 12 And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom The reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord. 13 So we

Your people and the sheep of Your pasture Will give thanks to You forever; To all generations we will tell of Your praise.

Here's my point: the glory of God is wedded to his cry for the wrath of God to be shown. You cannot separate the two. The reason that he is crying out for wrath to be shown upon the enemies of God is because of his great consummation, the great envelopment of his mind with this theme of the glory and the worth of God. And here's what you see when you start to see these themes, when you start to see this: these psalmist are not writing as petty, vindictive men trying to get their pound of flesh from somebody who has personally offended them. They have high and lofty goals about the glory of God that are animating them as they write and that means for you and I today, that we should look at these Psalms with deference, with a sense of reverence, with a sense that says, "Maybe there is something here that I am missing. Maybe the person who is missing something in what was being said here, is not the psalmist who is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, after all, and is consumed with the glory of God, maybe he's not the one that is missing something, maybe it's today's critic that is missing something fundamental that would change the perspective with which these things were written."

John Calvin said this and I quote, he said, "David did not allow himself recklessly to pour out his wrath, even as the greater part of men when they feel themselves wronged, intemperately give way to their own passion. He simply called upon God to exercise just judgment against the reprobate. It was not on his own account that he pleaded in this manner, but it was a holy zeal for the divine glory which impelled him to summon the wicked to God's judgment seat." You see, he's not praying, "God, you know, this guy ripped me off. Get back at him. Go out and fight for me." He's saying, "God, go out and defend your own glory." That's a different matter altogether, isn't it? That gives us a whole different perspective on it, the high theme of the glory of God, and what's interesting is that when you consider the theme of Psalm 69, that this is quoted in reference to our Lord Jesus Christ in John 2.

Turn over there with me just for a moment, John 2. You see, there are plenty of people who want to redefine Jesus down and rob him of his zeal for the glory of God and simply make him a lukewarm man who had very little in the way of convictions but was just always loving and disregarding of the sins of people and so forth. Not true. Not true. In John 2:13, the Passover, John 2:13,

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; 16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."

In verse 17, quoting from Psalm 69, it says,

17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume Me."

Well, beloved, when we see, when we come to the Scripture as those who respect God's word, who honor God's word, who view ourselves as being under its authority and that it judges us, we don't judge it, when we see the glory of God attached to such Psalms, when we see the Psalm applied to our holy, innocent and undefiled Lord Jesus, how can we take a negative perspective on these Psalms as if they were words that never should have been written? Out on the thought. Christ is opposing the false worship, the irreverence, the perversion of the worship of God to such a point that he is taking no prisoners. He is literally overturning tables because zeal for the purity of the worship and the glory of God is animating his sinless soul. That changes the way that we look at these things, and so we see these Psalms consumed with the glory of God.

Now, secondly, as you read these Psalms, you will find another theme that is animating him and that is this: it's the people of God. The people of God. Sometimes the psalmist is concerned to protect and to encourage the discouraged people of God. He wants them to flourish spiritually. He wants them to rejoice in the Lord, but as they are face to face with the seeming prosperity of the wicked, he knows that they become downcast, that they would shrink back perhaps from following Yahweh. So he's concerned and so he turns to the Lord in prayer in response.

Go to Psalm 35 with me. Psalm 35, beginning in verse 22. He says,

22 You have seen it, O LORD, do not keep silent; O Lord, do not be far from me. 23 Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right And to my cause, my God and my Lord. 24 Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness, And do not let them rejoice over me. 25 Do not let them say in their heart, "Aha, our desire!" Do not let them say, "We have swallowed him up!" 26 Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress; Let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over me.

And why does he say that or what else is in his mind alongside those thoughts as he prays against his enemies in this manner? Verse 27, he says,

27 Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; And let them say continually, "The LORD be magnified, Who delights in the prosperity of His servant." 28 And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness And Your praise all day long.

You see, in this Psalm here in Psalm 35, David is writing as a leader of the people of God, a leader of the nation of Israel, writing as the king, and the well-being of the people is tied up with their leader. This is not simply a personal matter of which he is writing about and speaking about, he is praying as the chosen leader by God of the people of

God, and what affects David, affects many other people as well. They see in him the symbol of the presence of God, see in him the presence of the blessing of God, and if enemies are triumphing over David, it is going to have a negative discouraging impact on the people of God. So David says, "God, rise up against these enemies," because he's praying not in a personal capacity, praying not as we sometimes selfishly pray here in the 21st century when somebody crosses us. He's praying from a much loftier position and a much greater theme in mind, and so he is praying in this representative capacity, "God, vindicate me so that," there is a pass through, there is a flow through benefit that he has in mind, "so that your people could walk in peace and confidence and courage before you. Answer my prayer against these wicked men for their sake." This is not a selfish prayer. God's people become discouraged when they see wicked people flourish, when they seek wicked people flourishing and triumphing over God's servants. Well, what does the man of God do in response to that? "God, deal with the enemies so that the people that you have chosen for yourself could flourish and be at peace." This isn't selfish. He's got far broader vistas, far bigger horizons that he is praying on than just his own personal interests.

Again, we can think of our Lord Jesus in this manner. Turn over to John 10. This is not specifically imprecatory but I want you to see this in this context. John 10. To remember this about our Lord Jesus, to remember this about the Savior of our souls, to remember this about the one who is Lord over our lives. John 10, Jesus speaking about the wolves that will sometimes harass the sheep, he says in John 10:1,

1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice."

Drop down to verse 7.

7 So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

This concern that we see in David in the Psalms as he prays for God to deal with his enemies so that it would benefit the people of God, comes to its full climax, comes to its full fruition as Christ comes and declares himself as the one who is preeminently concerned for the well-being of the people of God, preeminently concerned for the sheep of God, preeminently concerned to see them protected and provided for to the extent that he would even lay down his own life for that end. How precious are the people of God to

God himself? Well, you see it when the eternal Son of God lays down his life for them and says in that context, "I am a good shepherd." Well, David was an early prefiguring of that coming of Messiah, concern for the people of God and praying for their well-being. Is that something that we would criticize the Spirit-inspired writer for having on his heart the protection of the people of God? I don't think so and I don't think you do either.

You can go back and see another example of this in Psalm 37. We see the glory of God, the people of God animating these prayers. Psalm 37 in verse 35 David says,

35 I have seen a wicked, violent man Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. 36 Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found. 37 Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; For the man of peace will have a posterity. 38 But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off. 39 But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble. 40 The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him.

The people of God, their safety, their well-being, their deliverance being that which is animating his prayer. So we see the glory of God, the people of God being the object, the purpose, the motivating factor behind these imprecatory Psalms.

Let's look, thirdly, at another theme as the psalmist is often rebuking sin. You could say the rebuke of sin is our third point as he is addressing these matters. Look at Psalm 10:12 through 15. David speaks of the wicked and leading up to that passage he says in verse 7,

7 His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness. 8 He sits in the lurking places of the villages; In the hiding places he kills the innocent; His eyes stealthily watch for the unfortunate. 9 He lurks in a hiding place as a lion in his lair; He lurks to catch the afflicted; He catches the afflicted when he draws him into his net. 10 He crouches, he bows down, And the unfortunate fall by his mighty ones. 11 He says to himself, "God has forgotten; He has hidden His face; He will never see it."

And in response to that, David prays in verse 12,

12 Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up Your hand. Do not forget the afflicted.

He sees the people of God here but he goes on and says in verse 13,

13 Why has the wicked spurned God? He has said to himself, "You will not require it." 14 You have seen it, for You have beheld mischief and vexation to take it into Your hand. The unfortunate commits himself to



You; You have been the helper of the orphan. 15 Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer, Seek out his wickedness until You find none.

What's he saying? He's saying, "God, deal with them and put their sin to an end. Make an end of their wickedness. Stop them from this." He is opposing sin itself, opposing it as an offense to God, as being an offense to his holy name, his holy character. Are we to look at that and say that's not worthy? This is some kind of lower Old Testament spirituality that is not fit for the modern lips of a man of God? Are we to think that way? Well, I think not. Proverbs 8:13 defines the fear of the Lord this way.

13 "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate."

Now, beloved, look, these are not abstractions to the godly heart. This is not simply some kind of theoretical philosophical discussion from which a godly man, a godly woman, can just stand removed from and look on sin and evil and wickedness and not have some kind of reaction in her heart, some reaction in his heart against what he sees when he sees false teachers promulgating a Gospel, so-called, that is false and leads people away from Christ; that promises heaven to those who follow rules and regulations; when he sees men in white pointy hats parading as though they were the Vicar of Christ on earth. There is a reaction against that that says, "God, stop that! This is a violation of your glory! It's a violation of the Gospel!" You can't simply look at that and have a casual indifference to it. The man of God, the woman of God, reacts against such things, reacts against the sin and it becomes something which motivates them in prayer.

You find in these Psalms the psalmist having a deep reaction against sin when it is paraded to his face and he prays in response to it. Again, we can think to our Lord Jesus. We looked at the passage in Matthew 23, how he pronounced multiple woes upon the Pharisees because they were blind guides leading the blind into the pit. They were like whitewashed tombs, men walk over them not realizing they are stepping on dead men's bones. They were men leading others to hell and misrepresenting the true God, misrepresenting his law, and closing off the path of heaven through their works based religion and Jesus condemns them zealously, clearly, at length, and rebukes the sin behind it all, and you see that the Lord makes distinctions as he deals with sinners. To the prostitutes and the tax gatherers who would come to him in repentant mournful states seeking forgiveness, he receives them with grace and love just as he does every sinner who comes humbly to him. To the hardhearted, to the perverters of the Gospel, to false teachers, to those who oppose everything that Christ stands for, they meet his rebuke and they are on the receiving end of his announcements of judgment. You can't reduce Christ to a one-dimensional being as he deals with the hardened sinner versus the repentant sinner. So there is a rebuke of sin that is taking place in these Psalms that you see mirrored elsewhere.

Fourthly and finally for tonight, you see another aspect of these Psalms and that is we could say the conversion of sinners. The conversion of sinners. You find in these Psalms a purpose of advancing the glory of God, the protection of the righteous, the rebuke of

sin, and finally we come to even the conversion of sinners. Sometimes in these Psalms of these striking themes, sometimes the psalmist is seeking judgment as a means to bring about the conversion of the guilty. Isn't that a noble end?

Look at Psalm 2, the second Psalm. Psalm 2 which we looked at a few years ago. In Psalm 2:9 he speaks about judgment against the nations, prophesying of the coming triumph of Christ, and in verse 9 he says,

9 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'

But then he goes on in verse 10 and he makes an appeal to the kings of nations to heed what he is saying and to come in worship to the one true God. He says in verse 10,

10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. 11 Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. 12 Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

So there is this pronouncement of judgment that is combined with a call to repent; a call and an invitation to come to the true God, to leave behind at their sin, to leave behind their false gods and come and bow in worship and adoration with the implicit promise being he will receive you when you do. He's not simply pronouncing judgment upon them and then in a bloodthirsty glory waiting for it to come to pass. In the spirit of Jonah in Jonah 4 when he went up on a hill and waited for what he hoped would be the destruction of Nineveh, that's not the spirit here. He calls them, he invites them, to come to Yahweh, to come to the Lord in worship and rejoice and be reconciled to him.

Sometimes you see him wanting the wicked to learn the fear of the Lord. Look at Psalm 64:7. Well, verse 1, I always like to set the context. He says,

1 Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; Preserve my life from dread of the enemy. 2 Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, From the tumult of those who do iniquity,

And in verse 7 he speaks of the judgment of God that would come upon them. In verse 7 he says,

7 But God will shoot at them with an arrow; Suddenly they will be wounded. 8 So they will make him stumble; Their own tongue is against them; All who see them will shake the head.

But then look at what he says in verse 9. He says,

9 Then all men will fear, And they will declare the work of God, And will consider what He has done.

He says this judgment will provoke a fear in the men who see and observe it. Verse 10,

10 The righteous man will be glad in the LORD and will take refuge in Him; And all the upright in heart will glory.

There is this implicit call, this implicit invitation to repent, to leave behind the wickedness against which he is praying and enter into a fear of God which would show forth a conversion of their souls. And in Psalm 69, after the imprecation that we read earlier, Psalm 69, you see a similar focus of this stunning invitation to all to come to praise, to worship the one true God. In verse 34,

34 Let heaven and earth praise Him, The seas and everything that moves in them.

It's a call upon all creation to come and worship this God. Verse 35,

35 For God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah, That they may dwell there and possess it. 36 The descendants of His servants will inherit it, And those who love His name will dwell in it.

So, beloved, here is what I want you to see and we are still just kind of covering these Psalms in a general surveying manner here, not dealing with them in detail just now. Here's what I want you to see, as a whole when you examine these Psalms and group them together and passages like them, you find these Psalms doing things like this: defending the glory of God; protecting the people of God in prayer; seeking the conversion of sinners; standing opposed to wickedness. If we were to silence these imprecatory Psalms, if we were to do as Thomas Jefferson did and cut out certain passages of the Bible because they were not fitting for our theological predispositions, what would you do? Well, the Bible would be poorer for it. To silence these Psalms simply because they assault our modern sensibilities would silence noble themes of the highest grandest kind and blunt their sanctifying impact on our own hearts. When you think of the conversion of sinners to which we alluded, again we just come back to Christ seeking the conversion of sinners, calling them, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest"; that even as they are feeling the weight of judgment, feeling the weight of conviction, there is this call, there is this extension of a free offer of the Gospel, "Come to me and I will receive you. I will forgive you. I will wash away all your sin. Just come." And you find the themes of the Psalms lofty and exalted, you see the theme of the Psalms echoed in the person, the life, the ministry, the words, the very purpose of our Savior himself.

I've thought about these things for quite a while and a question crystallized in my mind, thinking about C. S. Lewis and others, critics: why are these imprecatory Psalms so reviled by men? Why do men hate these passages of Scripture in particular and condemn

them? Why not a reverence to God's word? Why not bow down before it? Why not take the posture of a learner, of a disciple, instead of that as a critic? I'll say it again, I'll ask the question again: why are the imprecatory Psalms so reviled by men? And beloved, think about it this way with me, think about the themes that we've said that they are advancing: the glory of God, the people of God, a rebuke of sin, the conversion of sinners. Why are they so reviled? It's because these Psalms belong to another realm. They belong to another realm that unregenerate men will never love and never approve. There is an exclusive zeal for God in these Psalms that the unregenerate heart hates because it suppresses the knowledge of truth. They won't give glory when they see the constellations moving in precise orbit, do you think that they are going to give glory to God when Psalms come along that convict and rebuke the sin of men? Of course not. The Apostle John said, "Don't be surprised, beloved, when the world hates you," 1 John 3. When you see the opposition of the world going against the people of God and you find Psalms that push back against that under the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the written word, unregenerate men aren't going to like that. It doesn't flatter their pride. It convicts them of sin. It shows them, it brings out before them that they are the enemies of God. These Psalms contradict and push back against the rebellious heart of men. They push back against the tolerance and moral ambivalence of our age. No wonder they are hated. No wonder they are reviled. No wonder men seek to put a muzzle on them and silence God as he speaks through Psalms like this, because the greater themes that they are advancing are hostility to the sinful heart, the unredeemed man, the unregenerate woman.

Beloved, not us, not us as Christians. We won't look at those Psalms in this way. We will understand them for what they are. The imprecatory Psalms are not hasty emotional expressions about human frustrations with human problems. They are carefully written literature guided by the Holy Spirit in what was expressed, expressing the prayers of righteous men to a righteous God offered in good conscience, standing, as it were, between the realm of Satan and sin and the realm of God and holiness and righteousness, and caught in the tension between the two worlds before the time that Christ comes to set it all straight. One writer said this, he said, "These Psalms are not in the last resort, human products, but rather the inspired works of the Holy Spirit." And how do we respond? How do we think about these things as we come under the authority of God's word in this particular expression of what he has revealed? The Old Testament commentator, Alec Motyer, says this and I quote, he says, "We need to read these verses with serious self-awareness and very solemnized minds and hearts." When we come to these things, we should take our shoes off, so to speak, because we are standing on holy ground. We should realize that we should resist the impulses of our heart that would cause us to be critical of portions of God's word and to condemn it. We should realize that we come and sometimes we take things out of context and we focus on only one aspect of what's being said, neglecting the greater themes that would inform the broader context of why the psalmist said what he said.

Beloved, I say this to encourage you, I say this speaking to you as the people of God, trusting that there are none in this room, none watching over the live stream who would join in the condemnation of a passage of God's word. I trust that. I believe that to be true

about you and so I speak to a sympathetic audience in what I say, with what I say here. For us, rather than reacting against the form of the words that are used here, what we instead should do is examine our own hearts for our own love of these great and lofty themes. How much, how high of a priority, how high of a motivation, how captivating to us is the glory of God. How concerned are we for the people of God. How fully do we fear the Lord that we would hate evil enough to have it be pressed out as we pray to our God in response to what we see around us. How much do we see those walking in darkness and desire that God would do a work that would prompt them and drive them to a converting experience that they might come to the Lord Jesus and be saved, and that the disciplining stroke of God on their lives would be a means to another end, that they would forsake their sin and come to Christ and be saved.

Ah, do you see it, beloved? I'm convicted personally as I say these things. It convicts me even as I'm standing here preaching to you, the themes that I would have my heart aspire to, and yet knowing that it falls so often short of the captivating essence that we find expressed in these imprecatory Psalms. What we need is not to be ashamed of God's word, embarrassed by it, but to say, "Oh, if only my heart would grow. If only the Holy Spirit would produce in me a greater zeal for his glory, a greater zeal for the people of God, a greater zeal for righteousness, a greater zeal for the conversion of the lost." If the imprecatory Psalms would have that impact on us individually and that impact on us as a congregation, I rather suspect that we would find ourselves more fully enjoying the utter blessing of God as a result, don't you? The weakness is in us, not in God's word. That could never be.

Next week, what I hope to do is to make this practical and say, "Okay, what do we do? How do we pray alongside these imprecatory Psalms, then, as we go through our lives? Now that we have seen their themes, their purpose, we've seen that they are holy pieces of God's word, how would we use them today in a godly way?" That's what I hope to deal with next Tuesday and I hope you'll be here with us.

Let's pray together.

*Father, if nothing else, we would stand apart from those who try to stand in judgment of your word and say, "I don't think God should have said it that way. I don't think that writer should have said what he said." Father, instead, let us take the heart of one who needs to learn, one who needs to grow, and conform our spirits to the themes which were animating your writers as these Psalms were written. Father, zeal for your glory, zeal for your people, zeal for holiness, zeal for the conversion of the lost. Father, every one of us here could stand to grow in every one of those areas. Father, we know it. We feel the weight of falling short. Father, we thank you that in our Lord Jesus we see these themes exemplified perfectly. No sin in him. Holy, undefiled and separated from sinners and he was zealous for your glory and he loved righteousness and he loved sinners as well that would come to him. So, Lord, we long to be like him. We thank you that in our Lord Jesus we have in his life and his death and his resurrection, we have all the righteousness that you require. Father, we cannot attain to the perfection that you require. Father, all of that perfection is found in Christ and we receive it by faith in him alone. So we thank you*

*for giving us the Lord Jesus, our righteousness, our sanctification, our wisdom, and by faith we humbly honor him today and we invite those who are outside of Christ to put their faith in this crucified and resurrected Savior who is sufficient to satisfy all the demands of God. Father, we ask that they would receive him by a pure and simple faith and enter into this kingdom that exalts your glory and is devoted entirely to you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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