

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 9.8.2024

PSALM 58 - THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE OF THE EARTH

I. INTRODUCTION

- According to Open Doors, a ministry that brings awareness to the plight of persecuted Christians around the world, it is estimated that more than 365 million Christians suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith.
- There are more Christians persecuted today than at any other time in history.
- Persecution is nothing new for the people of God.

- The psalm we will look at today is a reality check about the world that the church must live in.
- It is a world of injustice and suffering in which the wicked afflict the righteous.
- This psalm will be a potent reminder for the people of God, that though in this world we have trouble, we can take heart, Christ has overcome the world and he will come in righteous judgment on that Day to vindicate and reward his faithful people.
- If you are troubled by the injustice and suffering in this world, take comfort in the hope of the gospel and the promises secured by our Lord, the Righteous Judge of the earth.

Psalm 58:1-11

1 Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?

Do you judge the children of man uprightly?

2 No, in your hearts you devise wrongs;

your hands deal out violence on earth.

3 The wicked are estranged from the womb;

they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

4 They have venom like the venom of a serpent,

like the deaf adder that stops its ear,

5 so that it does not hear the voice of charmers

or of the cunning enchanter.

6 O God, break the teeth in their mouths;

tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!

7 Let them vanish like water that runs away;

when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted.

8 Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime,

like the stillborn child who never sees the sun.

9 Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns,

whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away!

10 The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;

he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.

11 Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;

surely there is a God who judges on earth."

II. THE CHURCH IN AN UNJUST WORLD

- The theme of this psalm is clearly demonstrated in how the opening and closing verses echo the theme of judgment and contrast between those who judge wrongly and God who judges rightly.
- These verses bracket the psalm and give it its theme: The Righteous Judge will vindicate and reward the righteous, who will rejoice when God judges the wicked.
- The psalm expands giving a profile of the wicked and contains a vivid imprecatory prayer for God to deal with the unjust by bringing judgment upon them.
- This prayer is greeted by joy and assurance from the righteous when God acts.
- David is mentioned as its author. And due to this psalm's placement in the Psalter, the likely context for the composition of this psalm was the period of David's life when Saul was trying to have him killed.
- The psalm opens with a rhetorical question addressed to those who hold some sort of power over people and lack a sensitivity to justice.
- "You gods," can also be translated, "mighty ones" or "rulers," or even, "in silence."
- David is calling out those who hold some sort of governing authority, perhaps people of influence who are silent in response to Saul's wickedness against David.
- The Hebrew text could be translated, to give it this sense, "Can you really speak righteousness in silence."
- "Do you decree what is right"; "Do you judge man uprightly"
- The word for righteousness is used, "Are your judgments righteous, upright or fair?"
- The tone in the answer of v2 is disbelief--an emphatic "No!"
- These who place themselves as agents of judgment are not governing rightly, they are keeping silent when they ought to speak.
- There are many who hold positions of influence and authority who do not use the power entrusted to them to work righteousness.

- Instead of doing what is right, making righteous judgments, speaking out against injustice and promoting what is just and right, they do the opposite.
- Those in Saul's inner circle should be speaking out against Saul's wickedness—but they have failed to uphold the righteous standards of God's Word—and have in fact, set themselves against God and His Word by not acting and judging rightly.
- David writes that the nature of their heart is wicked, that's the reason for their unjust rule.
- Their hearts plot and scheme and devise wrongs.
- Their hands are swift to deal out violence wherever they go.
- They have evil hearts, speech, and actions.
- The truth David establishes is the wicked have no redeeming characteristics.
- This calls to mind God's assessment of mankind prior to the flood judgment.
- Gen. 6:5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
- This is the world Jesus stepped into.
- John 2:24-25 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.
- This is the world in which we, as disciples of Jesus, must live.
- Isaiah 59:14-15 Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. 15 Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.
- Is it any wonder why the cause of righteousness is always under attack?

THE NATURE OF THE WICKED (3-5)

- As we saw in Psalm 51:5, David himself knew that he himself was born in sin, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."
- He knows that it is no different with the wicked. They have gone astray, speaking lies, from the moment they were born.
- Apart from the work of God to give life to the sinner, enlighten their spiritual eyes, what David says in v2 of the wicked is true of every human being who has ever lived and walked this earth.
- We are not born innocent or sinless. We are born in sin, with a sin nature every descendant of Adam has inherited.
- David likens the wicked to a venomous snake who had been trained by a skilled charmer but has since stopped responding to the tune and voice of the charmer.
- A venomous snake that does not respond to the voice of the charmer has become a danger as they will strike at their trainer when handled.
- The wicked are like a deaf snake that does not hear. They are insensitive to God and His Word, they turn a deaf ear to justice and righteousness, they ignore the cries of the poor and needy.
- They are deadly poisonous and deaf.
- They are deceivers who are they themselves deceived. "Deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13)
- In John 8:39-47, Jesus levels an explosive charge against the religious leaders who claimed to be righteous because of their lineage which they

could trace back to Abraham. He tells them that their father is the devil.

- Acts 7, Stephen, the first recorded martyr in the NT, testified boldly and truthfully to Christ, and leveled an indictment about the character and actions of his wicked accusers.
- Acts 7:51-52 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”
- Acts 7:57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.

- This is the terrible portrait of unrestrained evil, whose origins go back to the womb, the root is in the human heart that is wicked and deceitful above all else.
- In likening the wicked to dangerous snakes, he links them to the seed of the serpent, along with their father the devil, they are intent on killing the righteous seed of the woman, and they will not listen to the truth.
- The wicked are dangerous.
- And the way David communicates about the nature of the wicked removes all sympathy for their cause and any notion that they can be reasoned with and peacefully appeased.
- That is what we are up against in this troubled world.
- We need to have the proper biblical worldview and biblical understanding concerning this spiritual reality about humanity so that we will necessarily turn to God in prayer, for only a supernatural work of God can change the human heart, unstop deaf ears to make it possible for people to hear the word of God and respond to the truth.

III. PRAYING FOR THE DEFEAT OF INJUSTICE

- V6-9 are the content of David’s prayer for the overthrow of injustice.
- It is an imprecatory prayer. Imprecation is the act of calling for God to bring calamity, chaos and curses upon his enemies and the enemies of his people.
- David prays, “O God” and then “O Lord,” invoking his covenant name.
- Because of the Lord’s covenant with David and His people, he is pleading with God to do exactly what he promised to do.
- Because the wicked are like powerful predators, like serpents and lions, who incite fear, threaten peace, and want to kill the righteous, David, the anointed king, prays for God to smash their teeth and defang them.
- David’s prayer of imprecation is for God to demonstrate his power in judgment to defend his helpless people against the ferocious hostility of their enemies.
- *“God, break their teeth, Lord, tear out their fangs, so that they are ineffective in their cause for evil.”*
- He further underscores his petition with other images of God rendering the wicked’s actions ineffective and for God to wipe them away completely.
- David is praying for them to get what they deserve—comprehensive judgment for their wickedness.
- David is praying for God’s righteous justice to be meted out.
- Should we pray imprecatory prayers? The language is rather violent, harsh and unloving.

- We need to wrestle with the fact that because the Psalms contain the divinely inspired words of God and that these are divinely inspired prayers that the people of God prayed in the face of suffering, persecution, injustice, and hostility.
 - We look to the Psalter to give us the language of petition and praise.
 - We draw comfort from God's promises of protection and preservation in the midst of the hostility of this world.
 - It makes sense that the language of imprecation should also shape our prayers for God's justice to be enacted on the earth against injustice and suffering.
 - The Biblical record demonstrates that it is permissible for God's people to pray imprecatory prayers individually and corporately.
 - These prayers should be rooted in Scripture and consistent with the character of God.
 - Jesus called down curses, woes, upon the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23.
 - Paul writes in Galatians, that anyone who preaches another gospel is accursed, anathema (Gal 1:8-9).
 - John's vision in Revelation 6 of the souls that had been slain for the word of God and their witness, he hears their cry for the Lord to avenge their blood on those who killed them (Rev. 6:9-10).
- It is not unloving to pray for God to punish the wicked, to punish those who promote unrighteousness, who persecute the people of God, who inflict horrific violence on the earth, and who enact all kinds of injustice that leads to human suffering.
 - It is an expression of faith to pray this way, it is an appeal to the only one who judges rightly. (1 Pet 2:23)
 - Sin and evil deserve punishment.
- Christopher Ash, in his commentary on the Psalms, considers imprecatory prayers like this as the ancient form of the cry, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."
 - Jesus taught us to pray this.
 - Praying imprecatory prayers is not a call for us to take up weapons and other arms but to take to our knees and pray with the weapons of our warfare which are not carnal but have divine power to destroy strongholds, destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.
 - Praying for God to save the enemies of Christ by bringing them to repentance and faith, or punishing the enemies of Christ and his kingdom who have set themselves against the Lord and His anointed.
- A final note on praying imprecatory prayers. Only Jesus Christ, the only perfect and righteous one can pray these prayers with perfect purity of heart and unstained motivations.
 - We must pray for him to lead us by His Spirit in praying with proper humility of heart and to cleanse us of impure motives when we pray for God's judgment on the wicked.

IV. THE CHURCH PERSEVERES AND REJOICES

- Those who love God, who love justice, who love righteousness, rejoice when God executes his righteous judgment.
- V10, The righteous will rejoice when he sees vengeance...
- This is not the righteous taking vengeance, this is not personal revenge, but the just, holy, and pure vengeance of God—that is what prompts the joy of the righteous.

- All of God's people rejoice when the world that has been overrun with violence, the abuse of power, the oppression of helpless and poor, persecution of the Church, is finally restored and renewed, in the new heavens and the new earth.
 - We will see evidence of God's justice intersecting our time in human history, where the wicked are served justice, but we will see it ultimately and finally when our Lord returns.
 - There is a Day of reckoning, there will be final judgment, everyone will be called to give account before the Righteous Judge of the Earth.
 - And there will be rejoicing and gladness from the lips of the righteous.
- v10b The imagery of righteous bathing his feet in the blood of the wicked seems to paint a gruesome picture of people relishing in the death of the wicked.
- That's not the case.
 - The righteous is in the singular, not plural. The one enacting the vengeance is the Lord.
 - What we have here is battle language, imagery of victory in warfare.
 - In Scripture, the Lord is portrayed as the Divine Warrior whose garments are stained by the blood of his enemies when he triumphs over the wicked.
 - Read Isaiah 63:1-6
 - Read Revelation 14
 - Read Revelation 19
 - The image of feet bathing in blood is the image of the Lord, walking through the battlefield, through the blood of the slain, and the amount of blood demonstrates the comprehensive defeat of his enemies—they are no more!
- The godly will join in the victory march in the final triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ over his enemies and over evil.
 - We will rejoice on that Day.
- Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, "*There is nothing in Scripture of that sympathy with God's enemies which modern traitors are so fond of parading as the finest species of benevolence. We shall at the last say, "Amen," to the condemnation of the wicked, and feel no disposition to question the ways of God with the impenitent.*"
 - V11 presents two great conclusions regarding this time of comprehensive justice and judgment.
 - "Mankind will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.'"
 - All of the ungodly will witness at last what the righteous have always known by faith—there is a Righteous Judge and the righteous will be rewarded.
 - Here is the assurance that what is sown in suffering in this life for Christ, we will reap in final joy.
 - Our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).
 - Just like our Lord, who suffered and endured agony on the cross, entered into the joy that was set before him, we too, will also on that Day, enter into the joy that awaits us in glory.
 - Christ's resurrection and ascension gives us the assurance that what we can expect on the Final Day is not wishful thinking.
 - His life, death, and resurrection secures for us the hope that every wrong, every injustice, every suffering endured, will be met with righteous, holy, justice on that Day.
 - We will rejoice when Christ liberates creation from the power of evil and avenges the blood of the saints.
 - Do not grow weary in doing good, we will reap in due season if we faint not.

- Persevere in the life of faith, trusting completely in what Christ has accomplished for you.
- 2 Timothy 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.
- The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you (Romans 16:20).

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?