

Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)

All right, well, we are talking about imprecatory prayers in this series. Today, my objective is to construct a theological framework of justice and just to remind us of some of the things that we already know. Next week is the last Sunday that we'll be dealing with the subject of imprecatory prayers. For those of you who may not have been here, an imprecatory prayer is a prayer where somebody invokes God to curse or destroy his enemies or their enemies. You see this in Scripture quite frequently. I was reading through the book of Jeremiah this last week. Jeremiah is repeatedly praying that God would embarrass and shame and destroy those who are his enemies. And then Jeremiah talks about when God is going to embarrass and shame and destroy those who are his enemies. And so we are dealing with this subject of imprecation and how to interpret it.

And we are today going to—I'm going to give you twelve statements of sort of truths, some of which we've collected, some of which I've mentioned without really going into it, some of which I've mentioned at great length. I'm just going to give you twelve statements, theological statements or observations, that we have observed and made over the course of our study in imprecatory prayers. And there is no logical, theological order to this. I sort of just wrote them down and have been collecting them over the course of the last several months. And then when I got ready to put all of this together, I realized there's no order to this. So it might seem a bit of a scattergun approach, but the point of this is to basically put into place some of the building blocks that we're going to use next week when we look at five principles for praying imprecatory prayers.

So here's the first observation. I have twelve of them, and I will get through all twelve of these. I have to get through all twelve of these because I only got one more week. The first one is this: generic prayers for salvation or for deliverance from the wicked or for the fulfillment of God's eschatological plans are imprecatory by implication. It's a long statement, and I'm hoping none of you are trying to write all of this down because some of them are a bit longer than that even. So just listen carefully. Generic prayers for salvation or deliverance for God's people from the wicked or prayers for the fulfillment of God's eschatological plans, they are imprecatory by implication. And what I mean by that is for God to come and to begin to execute His eschatological, end-times plans is going to mean the destruction of His enemies and the enemies of His people. It will be a wholesale slaughter of those who have allied themselves against God. So even prayers such as, "Thy kingdom come," that's an imprecatory prayer. Do you understand what

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

"Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)" by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

you're asking for? There's only one way that's going to happen. Not slow and progressive without any violence. No, when His kingdom comes, it is the stone cut out of the mountain without hands that comes in and crushes the statue in Daniel. It is the destruction of all the kingdoms of the world. It is God putting His King on Zion and ruling them with a rod of iron and the destruction of all the wicked. So even an innocent prayer like, "Thy kingdom come," or "Come, Lord Jesus," that's an imprecation by implication. An imprecation by implication. You are implicitly asking God to do something to the wicked, namely to destroy them and to institute His end-times plans. The coming of Christ is going to be an imprecatory event. It's going to be a violent event. It has to be that by nature.

I want you to look at a couple of psalms here. Psalm 14:1–7:

1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.

2 The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

3 They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Ps. 14:1–3 NASB)

Now do you recognize some of those statements from somewhere? That's the book of Romans, right? Chapter 3. OK. Look at the next few verses.

4 Do all the workers of wickedness not know, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord?

5 There they are in great dread, for God is with the righteous generation.

6 You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, but the Lord is his refuge.

7 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores His captive people, Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad. (Ps. 14:4–7 NASB)

OK. Verse 7, when the Lord restores His captive people, the salvation of Israel will come out of Zion—what is that describing? That is describing a judgment that is to come. Not just that God would deliver His people Israel from their enemies, but when you talk about the ultimate salvation of Israel, you were talking about the complete destruction

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

"Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)" by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

and annihilation of all Israel's enemies. So, a prayer for salvation would mean often the end or the destruction of the wicked. Now it is possible for God to end evil without judging His enemies. That is possible, isn't it? For somebody to be committing untold wickedness and evil, and for this to be happening to God's people or to the innocent or to the bystander, and then for God to cause that to stop, we could probably think of a dozen, two dozen ways that God could cause that to happen. He could save the evildoer. He could cause the evildoer to have a heart attack and go to the hospital and stop his evil ways. God could make it impossible for the evildoer to do that, just like remove his physical or mental capacities for that to happen. There are all kinds of ways that God could stop evil without bringing judgment. But in the Psalms, that is rarely the case. Even some of the generic requests for God to save His people and deliver His people, even some of those generic requests are laden with the implication that this is going to happen through judgment, ultimate judgment upon God's enemies.

Second statement, though some psalms don't mention judgment upon the wicked (those are the non-imprecatory psalms), many of them lament the wicked and plead for deliverance. So even though there are psalms that do not ask God to curse or to judge the wicked, even those psalms are rife with mentions of the wicked and pleas for God's deliverance. And they don't go, those fifty-three non-imprecatory psalms, and I put them in that classification—those fifty-three non-imprecatory psalms may not necessarily go as far as to ask God to destroy the wicked, but the implication is that these wicked things are happening, these people are evil, they're doing this to the innocent, to Your people, so God, come and deal with this, make it stop. And the implication, even of the non-imprecatory Psalms, is that they are asking for some sort of a deliverance, which may or may not involve eschatological wrath.

The notable exception to that is Psalm 150 that I mentioned several weeks ago, and I'll just remind you, if there is a chronological order to the Psalms, in other words, David saw to the composition of the first two books of the Psalms—was it two or three? I think it was the first two books of the Psalms, mostly David's psalms, and there is a chronological order to those psalms as a story is being told. When you get to the end of the Psalter, Psalm 150, there's no mention of the wicked, there's no mention of judgment, there's no mention of wrath, there's no mention of destruction, there's no plea for any of that. Why is that? Because Psalm 150 is probably a picture, a portrait, of the ultimate state that we will enjoy when all the wicked have been done away with, when all wickedness has been judged. Then it's just praise. The wicked aren't there, the

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

lament isn't there, the angst over the people of God is not there and the innocent. It's just nothing but praise.

Number three, the reign of God cannot be separated from the destruction of the wicked and the judgment to come. The reign of God cannot be separated from the destruction of the wicked and the judgment to come. God's desire is to reign and to establish that reign and to demonstrate that reign and to manifest that reign to all of creation. This will necessarily mean the destruction of the wicked. Psalm 45, for instance, celebrates the king's marriage. It's a song written for a royal celebration, probably Solomon or somebody close to Solomon, maybe David. Psalm 45:3 says, "Gird Your sword on Your thigh"—now remember, this is a wedding song. This is what we sing at a wedding. This is the joy. This is the rejoicing. This is happy celebration.

3 Gird Your sword on Your thigh, O Mighty One, in Your splendor and Your majesty!

4 And in Your majesty ride on victoriously, for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let Your right hand teach You awesome things.

5 Your arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under You; Your arrows are in the heart of the King's enemies.

6 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom.

7 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows. (Ps. 45:3–7 NASB)

You probably recognize verse 6 as a quotation from Hebrews 1: "God, Your God, has anointed You," or "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom." That is quoted in Hebrews 1 to show that Jesus Christ is the God and the King who is spoken of in Psalm 45. So this is obviously a psalm written in a historical context that is describing the wedding ceremony, the wedding song, of a great king of Israel, but then there is, again, as we see so often in the Psalms, one who's looking beyond that event to another future event, and that is describing the one who takes this scepter of His kingdom and loves righteousness and hates wickedness and is anointed by God with oil "above Your fellows," and He reigns and He rules. And that will necessarily mean the destruction of His enemies. Look at—I could take you back to verse 4 where he talks about majesty riding on victoriously and Your arrows are sharp

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

"Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)" by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

and the peoples fall under You. That's destruction and judgment. So the King described in Psalm 45 is a righteous King. He is a ruling King, He is a reigning King, and He is a Warrior-king. And that King, of course, is Jesus. He is the one who is God, whom the Father calls God and anoints to rule and to reign, OK?

That's a quarter of the way through my twelve. Are there any questions on any of that yet? OK, we're not drawing any conclusions just yet. Just throwing out all of these observations, theological observations that we're going to use, sort of laying out pieces on the table that we'll use to put together the puzzle next week.

OK, number four, praise is given to God for His reigning. Praise is given to God for His reigning. His reign, His rule, His mighty triumph over His enemies becomes the source of praise and adoration for the people of God. It is something that they rejoice in. Psalm 47:1–4: “O clap your hands, all peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy. For the Lord Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth. He subdues peoples under us and nations under our feet. He chooses our inheritance for us, the glory of Jacob whom He loves.” Psalm 48:11: “Let Mount Zion be glad, let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of Your judgments.” In other words, the judgments of God and His rule and reign become then the source of rejoicing, the cause of rejoicing for the people of God.

God's people are to delight in God's righteous judgments. We should delight in that. If we can't delight in that, something is wrong with us and our perspective and not with God and His perspective. But we should be able to rejoice in God's righteous judgments. Justice and righteousness are God's attributes, and He delights in them. They're part of His nature and part of His glory, and He is worthy of praise and worship and adoration when He is revealed through His righteous judgments. This is the point of Romans 9. God, in order to show His mercy, was gracious to Moses. God, in order to show His justice, hardened Pharaoh. And we can praise God for His mercy, and we can praise God for His justice. And when justice is done, we can be thankful that it is done. We can rejoice in it. We can be glad about it. We can be happy. And we don't have to hide that from people. If suddenly Israel today just destroyed all of their enemies in the Middle East, and the evil of Hamas and Hezbollah and all of the other organizations stopped immediately, you would have your David French–style, latte-sipping Christians going online and lamenting this execution of justice and righteousness. And they'd be all clutching their pearls, upset about it, in an apoplectic fit. I would be rejoicing. I would be thankful. And I would praise God for His righteous judgments. And if God is to destroy

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

other people who are wicked, we can, I think, rejoice in the execution of those judgments.

Number five, imprecation involves God turning the plans of the wicked back upon themselves, letting them receive the evil they planned for others. That's in Psalm 64:1–8, which we'll read here in just a moment. This results in righteous rejoicing, right? Imprecation involves in Scripture God turning the plans of the wicked back upon themselves, letting them receive the evil that they plan for others. This results in the righteous rejoicing. This is what we would call poetic justice. What the wicked plan they get when God brings it back around to them. The wicked lay a snare for the righteous, and then they fall into the snare. This is Proverbs, right? The wicked lays a snare for the righteous, and he falls into that. He is entrapped by the words of his own mouth. It's this idea that God knows and He sees all of these deeds, and then He allows the wicked to set all of this up and then executes judgment upon the wicked by bringing upon them the very thing that they had planned for others. Like Haman, who was hanged on his own gallows, right? What a graphic display of God's justice. Haman—you know the story—builds the gallows, and he's the one hanging from it at the end of the day. Edom got what they deserved because of what they did to Israel. If you read the book of Obadiah, which I refer to as the prophet of poetic justice, you will see in there a statement in Obadiah, “What you have planned for God's people, God has brought back upon you. Your deeds will come back full circle upon your own head.” That's the book of Obadiah. Edom, when Israel was being raised and plundered, the Edomites, who sat, as it were, apart and watched that happen and rejoiced and even cut off—historically, they cut off escape routes for Israel so that they could be sacked and the raiders and the plunderers could be even more effective. And then Obadiah comes out and he proclaims against Edom, “What you did to others, what you planned for others, I will do to you.” They planned the complete destruction of Israel and God said, “Because you did that, I will turn this back upon your own head. You're going to get what you planned for them, and this is what is coming for you.” There is an equality between the judgment and the crime that is committed. That's the book of Obadiah.

By the way, you see it in the history of Israel. Israel sins; God uses—or sorry, I should say Judah sins to give this illustration. Judah sins; God uses Babylon to punish Judah. This of course creates a moral conundrum. How can You use a people more wicked than Babylon to punish us? And God says, “Don't worry about it. I got a plan.” And the plan was that God would use the Medo-Persians to punish the Babylonians, and that happened during Daniel's stay in Babylon when Belshazzar lost the kingdom in one

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

night. Remember that at the end of—I think it's Daniel 5. Belshazzar loses the kingdom and it's taken from him. And you say, “Well, did He leave the Medes and the Persians unpunished?” Nope, the Greeks came in and did that. Well, how about the Greeks? Did they remain unpunished? Nope, the Romans came in and destroyed them. Well, did the nation of Rome remain unpunished? Nope. What happened to them? They were split into four kingdoms and went away, and they lost the entire Roman Empire because of their folly and their sinful choices. So there is a cycle to this, a poetic justice that is involved in imprecations.

Let me give you some examples of that. Psalm 64:1–8:

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,

3 who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. [Pay attention to this language] They aimed bitter speech as their arrow,

4 to shoot from concealment at the blameless; suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear.

5 They hold fast to themselves an evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly; they say, “Who can see them?”

6 They devise injustices, saying, “We are ready with a well-conceived plot”; for the inward thought and the heart of a man are deep.

7 But God will shoot at them with an arrow. (Ps. 64:1–7 NASB)

Remember the previous slide? They sharpened their arrows, they have aimed them at the righteous, they have conceived this plot, and that arrow is going to go out, and like a boomerang, it's going to come right back and hit them. God would foil their plots by destroying their wicked plans. “Suddenly they will be wounded. So they will make him stumble; their own tongue is against them” (vv. 7–8). Remember in the previous slide, what did it say? They “have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow” (v. 3). And now God says, “The arrow will come back and hit them, and their tongue like a sword will be against them.” So that's poetic justice. So when we talk about imprecation, we are not praying or we are not asking God or

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

expecting God to do something to the wicked that they do not deserve, nor are we asking God to do something to the wicked that they are not planning to do to somebody else.

And then look at how this is a cause of rejoicing. Look at verses 9–10: “Then all men will fear, and they will declare the work of God, and will consider what He has done. The righteous man will be glad in the Lord and will take refuge in Him; and all the upright in heart will glory.” Glory over what? The wicked receiving what they have planned for the righteous. So when a terrorist plans to strap a bomb to his chest and wander into a pizzeria and kill thirty, forty, fifty, eighty people, innocent people, and he's walking down the street alone and the bomb goes off and destroys him, I rejoice in that. I would rather have that end than the other end. And that can cause us to rejoice. God does this in small ways with individuals. He does this in large ways with nations. And when we see it, we can rejoice in God's righteous judgments.

And by the way, if we refuse to rejoice in God's righteous judgments, then we are refusing to delight in one of His attributes. And if we are going to worship God as God, then we need to embrace all of His attributes, even the ones that make us uncomfortable. And we need to be willing and able to rejoice in those and to worship and glorify Him because He reveals all of His attributes.

Number six, the righteous should be disgusted by evil and have a righteous indignation over its temporary triumph. The righteous should be disgusted by evil and have a righteous indignation over its temporary triumph. Psalm 15:4: “In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord; he swears to his own hurt and does not change.” This is describing a righteous man. “Who may dwell on Your holy hill?” (Ps. 15:1 [see also Ps. 24:3]) And here's the answer: the one in whose eyes a reprobate is despised. We should have a righteous, despising indignation toward sin, and sometimes that means toward individual sinners who commit that sin. That indignation, that righteous indignation, can simultaneously exist with a love for our enemies. And again, if we can't get that, the problem lies with us and not with God.

Evil should elicit a righteous indignation and a visceral desire for justice from the righteous. We have that when we are offended, right? When you get offended, don't you get sort of indignant, a little righteously indignant when somebody hurts you, cuts you off in traffic, says something about you? You kind of get all huffy puffy. Well, how much more when the name of God is maligned? When His people are attacked? When

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

His holiness is thwarted, when His ways are mocked and ridiculed, when His Son is despised and rejected? How much more should the righteous be indignant about that?

Psalm 139, look at verses 19–22. “O that You would slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed” (v. 19). Look at that prayer, verse 19: “O that You would slay the wicked, O God.” That's what I prayed for at the beginning of this class, by the way. That's not the prayer of an unrighteous, vindictive, bloodthirsty, blood-soaked king. That's the prayer of a righteous man. “Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against You wickedly, and Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies” (vv. 19–22). See, these imprecations and these sentiments are David's righteous indignation and hatred for sin. He's not upset that somebody called him a name. He's not upset that somebody burned his dinner. He's not asking God to judge his cook or his maid because she didn't empty the bedpan or somebody because they forgot to give him a birthday present. That's not what he's asking for. He's righteously indignant over those who hate God, despise Him, and are His enemies. And David says, “Because zeal for Your house has consumed me, God's enemies are my enemies. And the degree to which they attack Him and me is the degree to which I want God's justice to fall upon His enemies.”

Allen Ross in his commentary on the Psalms says this:

These imprecations are the psalmists' expressions of their hatred for sin. The enemies who were actually attacking the righteous and taunting their faith were the embodiment of evil, vile people in whom falsehood and treachery, cunning, greed, hatred, cruelty, arrogance, and pride had found full expression. Could David have pitied them and treated them with kindness? He did that insofar as it was possible, but as king, he had to champion righteousness and punish evildoers in order to safeguard God's program.

Now this is one of the theological principles we have to keep in mind. There are times when David is expressing these sentiments and he is speaking of the coming eschatological judgment that the Son will pour out upon His enemies, and there are times when David is describing his own indignation over sin and sinners, and as king, he was commissioned to execute judgment. This is something—we have to keep this in mind. This is something that you and I do not share with David, right? God has made no covenant with us—that's called the Davidic covenant—and set us on His throne and given us the charge to execute God's enemies. David as a king was commissioned to do

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

that. So there are times when David had pity and treated them with kindness. There were times when he did that. He didn't execute Shimei when he came back into the city of Jerusalem after Absalom had run him out, did he? He didn't execute Shimei on the day that Shimei was cursing him when he left Jerusalem. And he could have, as king. He could have said, "You're cursing God's anointed." He could have executed Shimei right on the spot. And he had men at his ready who were willing to do that, but he didn't do that. Instead he gave grace to Shimei. He gave grace to Absalom and lamented when Absalom was killed even though there are imprecatory psalms where David is praying for the end of the evil and the destruction of God's enemies where Absalom is probably in the background of that. So those two things are both going on at the same time. And then you have David as king, whose job is to execute justice. He didn't execute God's justice upon Saul, a rebellious and wicked king, when he caught him in the cave, right? Now you may say, "But I remember David putting out a hit on Shimei when he handed the throne to Solomon." That's true. And probably because there is an execution of justice that was right for the king to do. And Shimei's time of grace had come up. It wasn't unjust for Solomon to execute justice like that.

Number seven, the desire for God's justice must be motivated by a concern for the victims of injustice and unrighteousness. This is key. The desire for God's justice must be motivated by a concern for the victims of injustice and unrighteousness. Psalm 10:12–18:

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

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 [The afflicted, the unfortunate, and the orphan. So here's the prayer.]

15 Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer, seek out his wickedness until You find none.

16 The Lord is King forever and ever; nations have perished from His land.

17 O Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

"Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)" by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

18 to vindicate the orphan and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth will no longer cause terror. (NASB)

What kind of terror is he concerned about? The orphan, the afflicted, the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden. David is concerned there. The psalmist is concerned about what is happening to innocent people who are afflicted by this wickedness.

Psalm 12:1–5:

1 Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases to be, for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.

2 They speak falsehood to one another; with flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.

3 May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things;

4 who have said, “With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?” [That's the taunting of the wicked]

5 “Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, now I will arise,” says the Lord; “I will set him in the safety for which he longs.” (NASB)

The concern of the imprecations and the prayers are for the needy, the downtrodden, and the afflicted.

Psalm 74:18–23:

18 Remember this, O Lord, that the enemy has reviled, and a foolish people have spurned Your name.

19 Do not deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast; do not forget the life of Your afflicted forever.

20 Consider the covenant; for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.

21 Let not the oppressed return dishonored; let the afflicted and needy praise Your name.

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

22 Arise, O God, and plead Your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproaches You all day long?

23 Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries, the uproar of those who rise against You which ascends continually. (NASB)

So that is David's lament over what the wicked are doing to the afflicted, the needy, the innocent, and that should be the concern behind imprecations.

All right, number eight, right on track. Not leaving any time for Angelika to ask questions; she's saving them all up for next week. [*someone comments*] What's that? OK. Now, in a modern context—before I go on to number eight, in a modern context, it would be appropriate to pray for wickedness and evil and God's destruction upon His enemies who oppose His people, who persecute Christians, who exploit people, who traffic people, who sell and buy slaves, or people who exploit the needy and the desperate with false teachers, prosperity gospel, fake healings, things of that nature. Those are appropriate expressions of imprecations in our own day.

Number eight, the righteous laugh at the wicked on the day of their calamity. I don't want to make too much of this, but this is something that has to fit inside of our imprecatory theology. Psalm 52:1–9:

1 Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The lovingkindness of God endures all day long.

2 Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.

3 You love evil more than good, falsehood more than speaking what is right.

4 You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.

5 But God will break you down forever; He will snatch you up and tear you away from your tent, and uproot you from the land of the living.

6 The righteous will see and fear, and will laugh at him, saying,

7 “Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and was strong in his evil desire.” (Ps. 52:1–7 NASB)

The righteous will laugh at him. They will see, they will fear, and they will laugh. “But as for me,” the psalmist says, “I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

lovingkindness of God forever and ever. I will give You thanks forever, because You have done it, and I will wait on Your name, for it is good, in the presence of Your godly ones” (vv. 8–9). Now the righteous are satisfied. They can delight and even chuckle and mock the fool who plans his little deeds and it all comes back upon his own head. And then the righteous can say, “He got exactly what he deserved.” Now you’ve got to be a little bit careful with that, don't you? Because you've got to also at the same time think, “What do I deserve?” And that has to have an element of humility that's inside of all of this mix.

Remember, God laughs at rebellion. Psalm 2:4–5: “He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury.” Verse 9 of that psalm says, “You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.” “The kings of the earth take their stand . . . against the Lord and against His anointed” (v. 2)—I think we're singing that psalm today. Is that right? Yeah, Psalm 2, we're singing that psalm today, and the kings of the earth do that, and God sits in heaven and He mocks them. He ridicules them. He derides them. What do you think you're doing? I'm going to shatter you like an earthenware vessel. I'm going to crush you like a clay vase—vase [pronounced as vāz], depending on how much it's worth. I'm going to crush you like a clay vase and shatter you into pieces.

Is that unrighteous for God to laugh at the wicked? To mock them? To ridicule them? It's not. I mean, obviously it's not. God does it. Obviously it's not. But there's some element that has to come in, again, with our own humility and say, though we may do this, though we may mock the wicked for his evil plans, when justice falls upon him, there has to be a sense of humility that's woven into that where we balance this, “We are distraught that the wicked have perished from the land because we know that they are being destroyed even in Hell for all of eternity”—there's a sorrow there over that. But I can rejoice at the same time that the wickedness has stopped and that God's justice has been manifested. And I can laugh at and rejoice in and declare that that justice is good while remembering at the same time that if not by the grace of God, I would be the object of the righteous man's scorn. And we have to balance that.

I hope you understand I'm in no way suggesting that we flaunt about and parade about holding up signs like Westboro Baptist Church saying, “God hates this, God hates that, God hates you,” and mocking them and taunting them. That is not the attitude that we should have. There should be mixed in with our delight and joy in God's judgments also a sorrow over the reality of those judgments. Both of these are appropriate emotions,

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

and they can be going on at the same time. How we balance that—I'm not even going to answer that next week. We've got to work that out in our own thinking. I'm just simply saying that there is a role for both of these.

Number nine, there is no contradiction between the everlasting lovingkindness of God and the destruction of the wicked or His judgment upon enemies and nations. There's no contradiction between God's everlasting lovingkindness and His judgment on the wicked. And I would point you to Psalm 136:10: “To Him who smote the Egyptians in their firstborn, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.” And by the way, that phrase, “His lovingkindness is everlasting,” is at the end of every verse in that psalm. It is “this, for His lovingkindness is everlasting,” it is “this, because His lovingkindness is everlasting.” It's every other phrase in there, and there are phrases in there that describe God's mighty works of grace and justice and provision and creation, yes, but there are also phrases in there like these three that describe God's destruction of entire nations. “To Him who smote the Egyptians in their firstborn” (v. 10). Verse 15: “But He overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea.” Psalm 136:17: “To Him who smote great kings, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.” There is no contradiction between God being an everlastingly loving, kind God and His destruction of the wicked. These two things are stated together, back to back, and we can affirm both of those.

God smote Pharaoh because of His lovingkindness. God destroyed Egypt because of His lovingkindness. He wasn't contradicting His lovingkindness. It is kind and loving and gracious for God to judge sin. It is an expression of love. It is also an expression of justice. Just as my disciplining my child or inflicting pain upon my child when they disobey can be an expression of love to them. By the way, Psalm 136, just as an aside, something a bit humorous here. When I was a kid in this church, they had a competition to see who could memorize the most verses between boys and girls, and the loser had to cook breakfast for the other. Like if the boys won, the girls would have to cook Easter breakfast. If the boys won it, the girls would have to—I just said the same thing maybe. And Psalm 136 was one of the psalms that I memorized because half the work is done for me. I just have to remember “For His lovingkindness is everlasting,” and then you can just rattle that off, and you're memorizing a lot of verses, but only half of each verse, which was great.

Number ten—there were probably girls praying imprecatory psalms when they heard us do that. Number ten, a desire for justice and judgment upon evil doesn't seem to be one of the wicked ways that God should search out and remove from us. Right? A desire for

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

justice and judgment upon evil doesn't seem to be a wicked way that God would search out and remove from us. And for that, I would just turn you back to Psalm 139. We've referenced this already.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

19 O that You would slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.

20 For they speak against You wickedly, and Your enemies take Your name in vain. (Ps. 139:17–20 NASB)

Have you ever had that kind of indignation when you hear somebody taking God's name in vain? Yeah, it should be every time. Unfortunately, it's not, but that's a fault with us. "Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies" (vv. 21–22). And then immediately he says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (vv. 23–24). You know, you don't have in the next verse him saying, "Lord, I just realized that my desire for Your justice and the destruction of Your enemies is one of these wicked ways that resides in my heart. I confess this. I repent of it. I'm sorry." David doesn't do that. So his desire for God's justice upon his enemies does not seem to be a wicked way that God would search out and remove from him.

In fact, because the psalmist's enemies are God's enemies, David aligns himself with God to the point where he is able to hate with the same kind of hatred that God hates the wicked. There is a way in which God hates the wicked. I would show you a few verses. Psalm 5:5–6. Now listen, let me prep this by saying I'm not in any way suggesting that God has no love for the wicked. He does. God loves even the most wicked sinner with a love that you and I cannot imagine. It is a creaturely love. It's not a redeeming love, but it is a love that is beyond even our capacity to understand and to commit to. And that is held out in Matthew 5 as an example of how we are to love our enemies. God does love His enemies, but there is also inside of the being of God a visceral hatred of some kind for those same people.

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

"Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)" by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

Psalm 5:5–6: “The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity [not “You hate iniquity”—that’s true—but “You hate the one who does the iniquity”]. You destroy those who speak falsehood; the Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.”

Psalm 11:5: “The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates [not the violence His soul hates—the one who loves violence His soul hates].”

Hosea 9:15: “All their evil is at Gilgal; indeed, I came to hate them there! Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house! I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels.”

Proverbs 6:16–19: “There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.”

Not He hates the lies and He hates the strife. There are six things that the Lord hates, and these are them, and there are people that are listed in that list. You’ve—said this before—you’ve got to have room in your theology for God to be a complex being in the sense that He can have two what seem to us to be conflicting desires or passions in Him at the same time for the same person. There is a love there and there is a visceral detestation of what is there as well.

There’s no repentance over prayers like this for justice. There’s no lamenting of the curses when they call for justice. There’s no lamenting it. I would submit to you that these are the right and appropriate passions for the godly. If we understood sin and we understood righteousness and we understood God’s nature, we would be able to feel and know and express all of these emotions. Now, am I saying that it is never appropriate to have love for the wicked unless you also hate them? That’s not what I’m saying. We’re more simplistic. We vacillate between love and detesting something, and we go back and forth as the wind might blow, but God does not. He’s always the same. His anger burns against the wicked day after day after day. This passion with which God detests the wicked, this visceral reaction that He has, it is always there, and it is always burning, and so is His love, and so is His lovingkindness at the same time.

Number eleven, the desire for justice to fall on the impenitent is a good desire. It is a desire for God’s righteousness to be vindicated. It is a desire for His truth to be known,

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

His glory to be revealed, for sin to be punished, for good to triumph, for evil to cease. Those desires are holy, righteous, and good desires because God will do those very things, and God, if He didn't have those same desires, would not be righteous or just. And so really, since God feels this way toward wickedness, you and I should have, if we are growing in holiness, we should have the same sort of love that God has for the unbeliever and the desire to reach out, as well as the same kind of visceral, indignant reaction to wickedness and sin when the afflicted are oppressed. It is appropriate for the righteous to desire these things. Allen Ross says this:

These imprecations are the expressions of the longing of the Old Testament believer for the vindication of God's righteousness. Their faith in God's goodness and righteousness was put to the test by malicious wickedness, and so they were left longing for vindication. Moreover, their imprecations made it clear that the wicked deserved the curses.

I could have put this down as number thirteen, but we have twelve tribes, twelve apostles, all of that, so I wanted to keep it at twelve. But this is another observation that we can make, that the imprecations that are called for in the Psalms are deserved. There's not one of them that is undeserved. There's not one of them where if we understood the truth, we'd say, "Yeah, that's over the top." The wicked deserve these curses. They're not unjust. They're not undeserved. They're not unwarranted. These curses are not out of proportion with the sin and the evil of the wicked. These are things that have happened and these are things that will happen.

And now twelfth and finally, David saw himself as king as being God's instrument to bring justice upon the wicked. I alluded to this earlier, but I want to revisit it here at the end. David saw himself as king as being the instrument of God who would bring justice upon the wicked. Psalm 101:1–8:

1 I will sing of lovingkindness and justice, to You, O Lord, I will sing praises.

2 I will give heed to the blameless way. When will You come to me? I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart.

3 I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not fasten its grip on me.

4 A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will know no evil.

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

"Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)" by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

5 Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; no one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure.

6 My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me.

7 He who practices deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his position before me.

8 Every morning I will destroy all the wicked of the land, so as to cut off from the city of the Lord all those who do iniquity. (NASB)

These are the words of David as a righteous king. He as the king of Israel was required and commissioned to execute the justice of God upon the wicked in the land. And so David is simply saying, "I will destroy all of the wicked." That would be the righteous thing for a righteous king to do. And as one who is speaking on behalf of, I think, Christ, because David did see himself as something of a Messiah figure, as one who is speaking on behalf of Christ, David is expressing here something that will happen in the coming kingdom. There will be a time when the righteous will be taken. Two men will be plowing. One will be taken and the other will be left. Two people will be in bed together. One will be taken and the other will be left. And that's being snatched away to judgment. That's not the righteous. That's being snatched away to judgment. And so when that happens, when that happens, the king will destroy all of the unrighteous and wicked out of the land. Well, David, as a king, was commissioned to execute justice as God's executor of justice in the land, as king. So sometimes he is expressing that.

By the way, I think that this speaks prophetically of Christ, as I've already mentioned, and I think it's true of the next passage we're going to look at. But remember, David had plenty of wicked people inside of his own administration, right? So I mean, there's a sense in which you're looking at this and you're saying, "Come on, David, you're overstating it just a little bit. I mean, how long did you let Joab go on and do his thing? And how long did you let this guy go on and do his thing? You had plenty of wicked people that had surrounded you." But this expresses the sentiments of a godly king who wants to execute justice as God's king.

I think this is the same kind of language we see here—Psalm 118:10–12:

10 All nations surrounded me; in the name of the Lord I will surely cut them off.

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

"Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)" by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

11 They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me; in the name of the Lord I will surely cut them off.

12 They surrounded me like bees; they were extinguished as a fire of thorns; in the name of the Lord I will surely cut them off. (NASB)

I should have memorized that for the competition. If I'd have known that was there. . . Do you see the pattern? See what David is saying? There's a righteous indignation. Allen Ross, again quoting him:

These imprecations are expressions of zeal for God and His kingdom. The monarchy was the earthly administration of the theocratic kingdom. It fell to the monarch David in the first place and his righteous followers to protect the institutions of the nation against enemies who sought to overthrow them and the faith. So if the king was God's representative, his enemies were not merely his enemies but God's.

OK, this is key. You had to wait all the way till now to get to the money quote, but this is the money quote. David as God's king is talking about executing justice upon God's enemies. The key is that these were not David's personal enemies all the time that he's been describing here. These are God's enemies. Because of the covenant that existed between David and God concerning the kingdom, the throne, the theocracy, because of that covenant and because David was commissioned to execute justice and righteousness in the land—that is what he was called to do—because of that, when David speaks of judging God's enemies, he is speaking of prophetically a future eschatological judgment that is to come. But David is also speaking as one whose enemies were also God's enemies. If David was a shepherd outside of Bethlehem eating off Jesse's table all the way through to the end of his life and he had died out in the field with the sheep doing his thing and God had never made a covenant with him, David never would have had those kinds of enemies. David had those enemies because he was God's representative and God's king. Therefore, those enemies were David's enemies because those enemies were God's enemies. That make sense?

OK, remember the gateway to the Psalms—Psalm 1, Psalm 2. Blessed is the man who walks in the law of the Lord, does not stand in the path of sinners, sit in the seat of the scornful, “but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2). Then you have people who oppose that man who is God's king, His representative. The nations rage. At the end of that it says to do homage to that king

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

lest you be destroyed. That's the warning sign that is above the entrance to the Psalter. So as we walk into the Psalms, we are keeping in mind that there is a blessed man who constantly delights in the law of the Lord, and therefore he is the enemy of the wicked because he delights in the law of the Lord. The blessed man of Psalm 1 is that King whom God will set upon His throne in Zion who will destroy the wicked. And now the end of Psalm 2, which is to do homage to the Son lest He smite you and you perish along the way, that warning is the warning to all the kings, all the wicked, all the nations—pursue this path of opposing God's Anointed, His Messiah, and you will perish. And so then what do we see in the Psalms? The people who oppose God and His anointed, David, they will perish. All David is doing in the imprecatory psalms is asking God to do what He has promised to do to the wicked. He's simply asking God that he may see it, that this may fall, to deliver the afflicted and the needy.

So, the vengeance, justice, triumph, and destruction of the wicked will be fully executed by the Messiah-King, who is David's descendant. He is the one to whom all these psalms point in some measure, and He is the one who will vindicate Yahweh's righteousness and holiness. He is the one who will judge the wicked and deliver God's people fully and ultimately from all evil and all evildoers. Now, that's a good quote. I didn't put that up there because those are my words, not anybody else's, but that is a good quote. God will execute His justice upon all evil and all evildoers. That is what He has promised to do. So, when we long for that, when we ask for that, when we pray for that, when we want that to happen, those are righteous and holy desires. And we need to make sure that we hold those desires in a way that honors the Lord and is tempered with other desires that we are also commanded to have, like love for our enemies and compassion, etc.

All right. I don't have any questions, but I will take one or two—or have any time for questions, but I'll take one or two if we have any. Yes. You're delighting my heart, Angelika. [*someone asks a question*] OK, Psalm 88. Yes, it is appropriate when you're reading the Psalms—and I won't repeat the question because I don't speak German, and I will just answer it and people will be able to tell what I'm saying. It is appropriate when we read the Psalms that sometimes we can read in the Psalms the voice of Christ when it's appropriate. So, when there is a confession of sin—my iniquities have done this, you've chastened me down, you've chastised me for my iniquity and my transgressions—we can't impute those to Christ. But when we see the innocent suffering—there is a sense when David suffers as an innocent man that he is picturing or portraying the ultimate suffering of the ultimate innocent Man. And so, that distress,

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.

just as it is appropriate to see Christ in His suffering saying, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46) not that there is an abandonment or division within the Trinity, but that is the real genuine expression of that sentiment that Christ in His humanity felt. And then you have later on in the psalm David coming back around in Psalm 22 and saying, “The Lord has not abandoned the afflicted.” God was there the whole time, but He expressed and understood the sentiment expressed at the beginning of it that I feel abandoned, I feel neglected, I feel forsaken. He wasn't, but He felt that. That was a genuine empathetic feeling that David had, and it is OK to see that as Christ in His distress. We know that that language was used of Him as well.

[*someone asks a question*] Yeah, well, going back to what we did I think it was in lesson two and three, one of the ways that the Psalms minister to us is by showing us genuine and real emotions and affections and then how we wrestle through that with truth to inform our emotions about what is actually true. So it is true we can sometimes take the words of the Psalms on our lips and say this is how I feel, but we also have to balance that by taking the words of the Psalms on our lips that describe what is actually true of us.

Yeah, Joe, quickly. [*someone asks a question*] No, because the institutions of our nation are not the same as the institutions of God's nation. We should vigorously defend things that are righteous—the church, the truth, His people, etc.—but I'm not interested in defending the CIA, the FBI, Congress, Supreme Court. I have no interest in those things at all. So those are not righteous institutions that have been co-opted. They were fallen institutions that God never ordained that have been co-opted.

OK, let's pray. Oh, yes, Emily. [*someone asks a question*] The question is does Christian nationalism get its incentives to defend institutions, even our own institutions, from misusing the Psalms? I would probably suggest that they do misuse the Psalms at some point. I don't know if that's where it comes from. I think it comes from an eschatological perspective, covenant perspective. I think it's a wrongheadedness. We're not national Israel. We're not the New Testament Israel. We have no institutions like that that are ordained by God.

Copyright © 2024 by Kootenai Community Church

“Toward an Imprecatory Theology (Selected Psalms)” by Jim Osman, pastor/teacher. Available online at: <https://kootenaichurch.org>

You may reproduce this content as is for noncommercial purposes. You may not create or use edited versions of this publication without permission.