

PRAYING THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS

From Psalms 11; 58; 69:22-28

[Welcome + SOF announcement]

Reading the Bible is a journey.

Static - boring/doesn't make any sense

Paved path - colorful/easy/refreshing

Tall staircase - difficult, but worthwhile

Rock wall - seemingly impossible

At Trinity, we are committed to teaching and preaching the hard and difficult texts. And I believe it's important to take the time in this series in the Psalms to unpack how Christians are to faithfully read imprecatory psalms because I believe in digging into the hard stuff. It benefits us in the long-term and, ultimately, it glorifies God.

At this point, you're probably wondering, "what does imprecatory mean?" An imprecation is just a fancy word for 'curse.' So an imprecatory psalm is a psalm that contains curses. No, we're not talking about four-letter curse words.

Imprecation/curse: an expressed desire for someone else's harm.

- When God does it: an expression of earthly punishment for wrongdoing
 - When man does it: asking God/gods to bring calamity/harm
1. Genesis 3: "Cursed are you [serpent]... I will greatly multiply your [Woman] pain in childbirth... Cursed is the ground... In toil you [Man] will eat of it all the days of your life"
 2. Genesis 12: "I will bless those who bless you; and the one who curse you I will curse."

3. Prohibitions against cursing...
 - a. Mother and father (Ex. 21:17)
 - b. Israel's leaders (Ex. 22:28)
 - c. The deaf (Lev. 19:14)

4. Curses in the NT: Acts 1:20; Rom. 11:9-10; Gal. 1:8-9

Having said all that, here's the over-arching message God wants us to know, communicated through the imprecatory psalms:

Because there are evildoers in this wrong world, right worship involves asking and trusting God to punish those who set themselves against God and His people.

The imprecatory 'problem':

1. All Scripture is inspired by God
 - a. It's true for all time
 - b. It's useful for personal holiness
2. The Psalms invite its hearers to curse others
3. The NT invites its hearers to:
 - a. "Love your enemies and pray *for* those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44)
 - b. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (Rom. 12:14)

How can 2 and 3 be reconciled with 1?

In order to answer this question, we need to take one more step by classifying the types of imprecations we find in the Psalms.

Types of Imprecations/Curses in the Psalms:

1. **Against anonymous wicked people (Psalm 11)**

Observations from Psalm 11:

- Wicked people exist and are opposed to the righteous
- Even so, the LORD is aware and in total control
- The LORD “hates” those who love violence
- The LORD will repay both righteousness and wickedness

Though this doesn’t technically count as a ‘cursing’ psalm, it demonstrates that God’s people have good reason to not only desire God’s justice, but also actively ask for it.

This psalm isn’t directed to any person in particular, but the wicked generally speaking. David might have had a few people in mind when he wrote this, but the point was to recognize and legitimize the desire for God’s justice in the hearts of all God’s people.

Other verses in the psalms to contain imprecatory language against anonymous evildoers:

“Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more!” (104:35)

“Oh that you would slay the wicked... Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? I count them my enemies” (139:19, 22)

“Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely” (141:10)

2. Against wicked rulers (Psalm 58)

Observations from Psalm 58:

- Written about a category of people: *rulers*
 - “O gods [judges/mighty ones]”
 - “Do you judge...”
- Entrusts punishment to God (v. 6-9)
- God’s just punishment is source of rejoicing for the righteous (v.10)
- Again, not directed to a particular ruler (though the author probably had one in mind). The point of this psalm, like psalm 58 is to acknowledge and legitimize the desire of God’s people for God’s just punishment upon evil rulers.

3. Against the personal enemies of God’s unique representative (Psalm 69:22-28)

Observations about Psalm 69:

- Written by David against his personal enemies, “Deliver me from the mire and do not let me sink; May I be delivered from **my foes** and from the deep waters... All **my adversaries** are before you.”
- David is not just another dude – he is the federal head of Israel. This means that what is said about/against David is said about/against Israel. This is true of no one else *except* for those sit on David’s throne.
- “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:15).
- We need to read these kinds of psalms on the lips of Jesus rather than on our own.

Three types of imprecations/curses: curses against the wicked generally speaking, curses against wicked rulers/categories of

people, and curses against the personal enemies of God's unique representative (David/Jesus).

Review: Resolving the imprecatory "problem"

1. Evil people & institutions exist
2. God's people are called to share God's attitude towards evil & evildoers
3. God's attitude towards evildoers is demonstrated by the outpouring of His wrath in judgment - (on the cross, in this world, or in the world to come)
4. Asking God to punish evil is appropriate on an impersonal or institutional level
5. Because no one except Jesus is God's unique representative, praying imprecations against personal enemies is sinful as it undermines our call to bless those who persecute us (Rom. 12:14).

Together we are to...

1. Be aware of the evil in this world
2. Ask God to stir up righteous anger towards evil
3. Ask God to punish/destroy *impersonal entities, institutions,* and *categories* of people who actively oppose His rule and reign
4. Seek and pray for the good of *individuals* who persecute or mistreat us, entrusting our vindication fully to the LORD

COMMUNION

- If we're honest, talking about curses/punishment/judgment is a bit off-putting. Why? Because none of us think we're that bad. If anything, we think we're too good, we should be too nice to talk about this stuff. None of us is born understanding the weight of sin - its separating power that makes us enemies of the Almighty God.

- What's so remarkable about communion is that it commemorates the time when God took on my curse and your curse so that we could be reconciled to Him.

[Read Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12]

- Communion celebrates the turning of curse to blessing on the cross. (Invite ushers up)
- At Trinity we practice 'open communion' BUT

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly

Sit/wait

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;

24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

- Pray + Eat

25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

- Pray + eat