

“Righteous Judgment”
Psalm 58
(Preached at Trinity, February 13, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we begin **Psalm 58** we find the opening superscription almost identical with the previous psalm.
 - A. It was prepared by David and given to the chief musician. David attaches to it the notation: *Altaschith* - Literally it means, “do not destroy.” This is the first of four psalms with this designation. It could be a command to preserve this psalm – “Do not destroy it.” Or it could refer to David’s plea that God not utterly destroy the heathen—which would seem inconsistent with the tone of the psalm:
Verse 8 – “let every one of them pass away.”
Or it could simply be the particular tune that was to accompany the psalm.
 - B. It was a *Michtam* of David. As we’ve seen, there are six psalms with this designation. No one knows for certain the meaning of this word. Some believe it comes from a word that expresses something hidden.
These psalms contain hidden truths that only God’s people can know and experience.
2. Psalm 58 is another of the imprecatory psalms. This one is a bit different because the first half justifies the harsh tone of the second half.
3. David is calling down God’s judgment upon the wicked leaders of Israel, particularly the judges. They were men void of character, easily swayed to deliver unjust judgments upon the people.
4. To some degree it also spoke to the people in general. David’s enemies were many and they were united in their condemnation of David. Some think this psalm has its setting in the treachery of Absalom who turned Israel against David. Their judgment, however, was not righteous judgment but was based upon the opinions of the masses. We call it *hearsay*. It was a group mentality. God demands that we judge with righteous judgment.
John 7:24 – “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”
 - A. This “mob rule” mentality was a factor in our Lord’s crucifixion
Mark 15:11 – “But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.”
Luke 23:18 – “And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this *man*, and release unto us Barabbas.”
Luke 23:21 – “But they cried, saying, Crucify *him*, crucify him.”
 - B. As God’s people we are permitted to make certain judgments about individuals. People are often guilty of quoting Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount as if it is a prohibition against all judgment:
Matthew 7:1 – “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

- C. This is not an absolute prohibition.
1. We are prohibited from making presumptuous judgment
 - a. We are not allowed to make judgments made in the absence of all the facts or judgments apart from the rule of God's Word.
 - b. We are not allowed to make self-righteous judgments while ignoring our own sins
 - c. We are not allowed to harshly judge another person's motives or to have a hyper-critical or judgmental spirit.
 2. We *are* permitted to make judgments – “righteous judgments”
 - a. Evangelism demands some form of judgment
 - b. We are allowed to form certain conclusions based upon the external actions of individuals.
Matthew 7:20 – “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”
5. But the chief target of David's charge was upon the leaders of Israel who were partial in their rendering of justice. David was experiencing this personally. Israel's leaders lacked character and David was calling upon God to bring down judgment upon them.
6. Although this psalm was written 3500 years before Christ it speaks volumes to our generation where corruption seems to permeate every branch of our political and judicial system.
- A. Almost everyday we hear of a new scandal; another politician has been caught taking a bribe or influence peddling or the misuse of campaign funds or an adulterous affair has come to light or worse. We even had a president who had an affair in the oval office. Our own state has a history of corruption. We have an ex-governor just now being released after serving time in prison for his corruption. We have a senator whose name was listed in the phone records of a prostitute. Another congressman was caught with bribery money hidden in his freezer.
 - B. It would seem that there is a universal void of character among our leaders. There are few that we could say are people of principle—who stand upon the universal principles of morality and justice.
 - C. The leaders of a nation are appointed by God as His ministers of justice. They are to serve as God's agents to provide just laws and to make just judgments. When leaders lack character and principle and fall into corruption the people suffer greatly.
Proverbs 29:2 – “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.”
 - D. We should pray that God judge such wicked leaders and remove them from office.
Psalms 109:8 – “Let his days be few; *and* let another take his office.”
7. There are two simple sections:
- I. In **Verses 2-5** David brings an indictment against the wicked
 - II. In **Verses 6-11** David calls down God's judgment upon the wicked
- I. In **Verses 1-5** David brings an indictment against the wicked leaders
- A. In **Verse 1** David begins by asking a simple question:
 “Are you judging righteous judgment?
Psalms 58:1 – “Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?”

1. The question is being made to Israel's leaders
KJV Verse 1 – “Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation?”
NAS – “Do you indeed speak righteousness, O gods?”
 - a. The word literally refers to “mighty ones”
 2. David is referring to those in authority, in particular the judges who had fallen into corruption and had ceased delivering just judgment.
- B. David accused them of having wicked hearts
Psalm 58:2 – “Yea, in heart ye work wickedness”
1. The problem of lost humanity is the issue of a bad heart.
Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”
 2. It is a birth defect – we are born with the condition
Psalm 58:3 – “The wicked are estranged from the womb”
 - a. We are born in wickedness. We are plagued by sin from our mother's womb.
 - b. This is a clear statement of original sin
 3. It affects every part of our being
 - a. It affects our wills – We will not pursue righteousness and we will not seek after God
Romans 3:10-12 – “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”
 - b. It affects our emotions – we lust after those things that satisfy our base nature. We labor hard to satisfy the longings of our corrupt hearts.
 4. From the wicked heart flows every corruption
 - a. Jesus spoke this clearly
Matthew 15:18-19 – “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. ¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”
 - b. It controls what we speak
Psalm 58:3 – “they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”
 - c. It also controls what we do
Psalm 58:2 – “Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth.”
- C. David says there is another important issue – Some might try to excuse their responsibility because they didn't openly participate in the injustice
1. David compares their inaction to that of a snake who will not hear the charmer – **Verses 4-5.**
 Their poison is no less deadly
 2. No one can stand idly by while injustice rules and iniquity prevails. Silence implies acceptance. Silence gives consent.
 Spurgeon: “He who refrains from defending the right is himself an accomplice in the wrong.”

3. We cannot hold our tongue when wickedness is all around us.

III. In Verses 6-11 David calls down God's judgment upon the wicked leaders

David's call for God's judgment includes several different petitions

- A. That God would render them powerless – remove their ability to do their evil

Psalm 58:6 – “Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD.”

 1. They were fierce in their attacks upon David
 2. In the previous chapter David compared them to lions

Psalm 57:4 – “My soul *is* among lions”
 3. It is permissible for us to pray that God will remove the power of a wicked leader – To render them powerless.
- B. That God would forever remove them from their position

David speaks in the strongest of words

 1. That they would fade away like water flowing after a storm

Psalm 58:7 – “Let them melt away as waters *which* run continually”
 2. That the very tools they use for the destruction become worthless

Psalm 58:7 – “*when* he bendeth *his bow to shoot* his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces.”

NAS **Psalm 58:7** – “let them be as headless shafts.”

ESV **Psalm 58:7** – “let them be blunted.”
 3. That they would melt away like a snail – it was the common belief by the ancients that the slimy trail left by a snail subtracted from the body of the snail until there was nothing left but an empty shell.

Psalm 58:8 – “As a snail *which* melteth, let *every one of them* pass away”
 4. That they would be like a woman's miscarriage

Psalm 58:8 – “let *every one of them* pass away: *like* the untimely birth of a woman”
 5. That they might not see another sunrise

Psalm 58:8 – “*that* they may not see the sun.”
- C. David prays that they might not enjoy another pleasure

Psa 58:9 – “Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away”

 1. The picture is of setting a pot filled with meat and stew upon a fire. David says before the fire can be lit a mighty wind comes and takes it all away.
 2. May they never savor another fine meal. May they never enjoy another single one of life's pleasures.
- D. The righteous rejoice when God executes His justice

Psalm 58:10 – “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance”

 1. We are not allowed to execute vengeance ourselves

Romans 12:19 – “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”
 2. We can rejoice, however, when the wicked rulers are brought to an end. The righteous rejoice at the righteous vindication of God's glory.
 3. Again, David paints it in vivid colors

Psalm 58:10 – “he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.”

4. How do we reconcile this with Matthew 5?
Matthew 5:44 – “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;”
- a. We can be merciful and at the same time despise the wickedness upon the earth.
 - b. This is following the way of God. He is both merciful and swift to bring judgment.
Matthew 5:45 – “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”
Psalm 7:11-13 – “God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day. ¹² If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready. ¹³ He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts.”
Psalm 5:5-6 – “The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. ⁶ Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.”
5. The righteous also rejoice that God always judges with righteous judgment. He is not like the wicked judges of this earth.
1. God is the ultimate judge of this earth
Psalm 58:11 – “So that a man shall say, Verily *there is* a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.”
 2. While it may not seem that justice is received in this life, God’s justice is sure.
 He will reverse every injustice
 He will execute judgment upon those who escape it on this earth

Conclusion:

1. God is a lover of justice.
2. Each of us are giving varying degrees of influence upon the earth. Each of us are called upon to live according to justice and truth. May we be people of character and principle. May we always be lovers of justice. May we always live justly upon the earth.