

Psalm 109:1-31 The Suffering King GOOD FRIDAY April 7, 2023

What are such fierce words of curses doing in the Bible?

Christians are supposed to bless those who curse us, right? Jesus taught in Matthew 5:44, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...*”

The presence of fiery statements create an embarrassing problem for the Christian. The language here seems irresponsible and wildly lacking in self-control, civility, courtesy, and love. The words here are savage. There was an instance in church history when Psalm 109 was removed from the singing Psalter and was replaced with a hymn on the beauty of forgiveness!

How can we understand these words? They are a cry for justice.

Psalm 109 is supposed to get us fired up, like the shocking immediacy of a scream. A very loud scream has the effect of startling us to instantly feel something of the desperation that produced that scream.

We hear a scream from the author, King David, and we are startled into experiencing something of the desperation of his suffering.

We triple-employ this Psalm for each sufferer: David, Christ, and the Christian.

After reading with David in mind, we go through the Psalm twice more. The second time, we hear a scream from the Son of David, even Jesus Christ from the cross. We are jolted into considering His suffering on Good Friday. The third time through the Psalm, we hear ourselves scream, and we find in Psalm 109 a rich guide to help us face our own pain and suffering.

1. David - The suffering king was accused, agonized, and prayed. (v.1-5)

Psalm 109 is a lament. A lament is a prayer goes to God and reports about a problem, asking for help. Certain laments focus on the distress caused by others and that is where the element of curse comes in.

The beginning of the Psalm is mild. It starts with David asking God not to remain silent. Why? Because the enemies are troubling David. Verse 2 – their speaking is deceitful and wicked lies. Verse 3 – they have words of hate, and attack David without a reason. Verse 4 - though David loves, them they accuse David. What is David’s reaction? Verse 4 – David wrote, “*I give myself to prayer.*” That is a good way to react. What David wrote here is literally translated, I prayer. I am prayer. When they utter false words about me, I am always praying to God about it.

2. David - The suffering king spoke curses on God’s enemy. (v.6-20)

When we move forward from the first section, verses 1-5 to the next section, verses 6-20, there is a change in the reference to the enemies as plural “*they*” now becoming a singular “*him.*” The focus is on a single enemy, a specific individual.

Now we gear up to face the fierce words. David would not be allowed to say such curses out of personal vindictiveness. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament condemn the taking of personal revenge.

Vengeance belongs to God. Only God can curse someone. Deuteronomy 32:35, "*Vengeance is mine, ...*"

There is hardly a Psalm of David in which David does not refer to his enemies. He had many enemies. It seems what David was most concerned about from his enemies was not the swords, but words.

Many psalms have an occasional prayer for God's judgment on enemies, but here there are 24 curses on enemies.

We must remember that David was writing as king of a nation, and not merely as a private citizen. These curses are spoken by a king whose responsibility as king was to make sure justice was given to evil persons.

So, we look at these verses 6-20 in that light.

It takes place in a courtroom - a court of law. Consequently, this passage has a legal tone, and King David is involved in prosecuting a case. To speak against the king is to speak against God, for this king was appointed by God.

So, David is appealing to God, as the Judge presiding over the worldwide courtroom. The king is officially asking God to provide justice to the wicked person who has been extremely harmful. The king was asking God for a specific sort of justice, we sometimes call this poetic justice. Namely, that the one who did harm to others will himself be harmed.

How does that take shape? Let me read verse 6, where David is making a legal motion in court to ask God to set up the scene properly this way, and I quote verse 6, "*Appoint a wicked man against him (the accused); let an accuser stand at his right hand.*" The one who ought to be standing at the right hand of the criminal is his lawyer, a public defender to defend the criminal. But instead, David prayed to God that this criminal get an accuser instead of a defender! David wanted the criminal to receive what the criminal doled out – namely that the man he trusted – his own lawyer – turns out to be a criminal who breaks the rules of a fair courtroom! May the public defender be an evil man who does not provide the criminal with a fair trial! David did not want the man to have any defenders at all, because the actions of the criminal are defenseless. The word here that is translated "accuser" in verse 6 is the Hebrew noun Satan! The very same name and title of the devil, the accuser of the brethren. It could be that David was even asking for God to sic the devil on this criminal! Or, it is actually an insight into the world of the devil. Those criminals who side with and work for the devil will find out that in the end, Satan is not on their side! In the end, Satan will turn on them and accuse them!

Verse 7, David wants him to be found guilty. Verse 8, David wants his life to be short and for someone else to take his place.

In verses 9-15, David got more vicious. Statements about the criminal's future, his children, his wife, his parents, and especially his mother. David is reflecting God's truth about how sin harms a community. The criminal did not only harm himself, but he also harmed many people around him. Crime contains its own punishment – crimes that are committed are damaging to everyone in one's life.

Think of the second commandment within the Ten Commandments, God says that He is "...*punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate...*" God. Exodus 20:5 David understood that our sin impacts everyone around us.

Verses 16-20, show no repentance on the part of the criminal. Verse 16, he did not show kindness to the poor and needy, verse 17, because he gave out curses, may those curses boomerang back to him, he did not give out blessings, so may no blessings go to him, verse 18, more about curses coming back to him, verse 19, may he wear his curse like clothes, verse 20, the word accusers again – may those who accused David become the ones who are accused.

We all sin. But this criminal was on a destructive path, and insisted on staying on a destructive path. This criminal was sinning knowingly. The criminal was deliberate and gleeful about the destruction, and planning to continue.

3. David - The suffering king put the whole matter into the hands of God. (v.21-31)

In verse 21, we get the mood-changing words "*But You, O GOD my Lord...*" This is the pivotal moment when David turned the whole matter over to God.

Look what David prayed in verse 21, "deal on my behalf!" Since You are the God who is on the side of the righteous, and not on the side of the evildoers, then take charge of the situation and deal out Your verdict! Look at the reason. Verse 21, "*FOR YOUR NAME'S SAKE.*" Furthermore, in verse 21, "*BECAUSE YOUR STEADFAST LOVE IS GOOD, DELIVER ME!*"

David is not selfish. David is more concerned about God's name to be vindicated, than for David to be comfortable.

David is also not praying from a stance of strength. Verse 22, I am poor and needy, my heart is stricken within me.

Verse 23 – I am gone like a shadow at evening; I am shaken off like a locust. A puny and repulsive creature. David felt that he was viewed as puny and repulsive, and that being viewed with contempt from others could be compared to being an unwanted insect on the sleeve of a person, who then shakes you off.

Verse 24 – weak and gaunt, verse 25, an object of scorn, and they wag their heads at him.

Verse 26 – Help me O LORD – referencing His steadfast love.

Verse 27 – David asked God to let the people know it was God’s hand.

Verse 28 – even though people will curse David, what counts is that God will bless David!

Verse 29 – in fact, what the accusers gave to David, will boomerang back to them!

Verse 30 – David promises to give thanks publicly, once He receives God’s help.

Verse 31 – look who stands at the right hand of the needy one – the LORD God! Who would save David from those who condemned him? The LORD God!

Now compare verse 6 and verse 31. Back in verse 6, the accuser stood at the right hand of the person being accused, in order to condemn him. Now look what is happening in verse 31. David rejoiced that it is The LORD who stands at the right hand of the needy one. Now let’s go through the Psalm a second time with Christ in mind on Good Friday.

1. Christ - The suffering king was accused, agonized, and prayed. (v.1-5)

The experience of David in Psalm 109 of betrayal also fit the experience of Jesus in betrayal by close associates and members of the covenant community.

We also read in John 1:11, that Jesus “...*came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.*” The description of deceit, lies, and hatred corresponds to the plotting of the scribes and Pharisees against Jesus, which we read about in Matthew, chapters 26 and 27. What is very instructive for us is that Jesus did not take up His own cause, but rather appealed to the Father in heaven to vindicate Jesus. Another thing that is instructive is that while Jesus waited for the answer from God the Father, it was still the case that Jesus faced hardship. So we see how this matches the hardship experienced by Jesus when we consider verses 22-29. The Psalm appropriately closed with a vow of thanksgiving looking forward to the day when Jesus could celebrate His deliverance from death, verses 30-31.

Psalm 109 also makes sense as a prayer that Jesus would have picked up and prayed Himself! The Psalm is the appeal of God the Son to God the Father to deliver Him from such bloodthirsty people and to save Him from death. Also, the words of curse in the Psalm would be the words of Jesus speaking against those members of the covenant community who reject Him. Such curses would especially apply to Judas, who betrayed Jesus into the hands of the men who had Jesus put to death. The cursing is aimed at members of the covenant community who have broken the covenant with God, and have fallen away from God and fallen into apostasy.

2. Christ - The suffering king spoke curses on God’s enemy. (v.6-20)

When the enemies change from plural to singular, it is in the second section, and verse 8 to be exact, that the apostle Peter picked up when he reported about an

enemy of Jesus. Some have called Psalm 109 The Iscariot Psalm, after Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus. Consider the words of the apostle Peter in Acts 1:16, "*Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.*" And verse 20 Peter quoted from Psalm 109:8 – let another take his office.

Also, regarding sins impacting our families and communities, listen to the grieving words of Jesus about how we hurt each other in Luke 19:42-44. When Jesus drew near Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it, "...saying, *Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation...*" They failed to recognize God and pursue God.

This is fulfillment of verses 16-20, their lack of repentance.

3. Christ - The suffering king put the whole matter into the hands of God. (v.21-31)

Consider the crucifixion of Jesus. Verse 21, deal on my behalf, deliver me, verse 22, poor and needy, my heart is stricken, verse 23, gone like a shadow at evening, shaken off like a locust – Jesus received contempt didn't He? Verse 24, weak, gaunt, verse 25, an object of scorn, they wag their heads.

Listen to how Matthew reported for us what happened for Jesus, picking up this very action of people in contempt wagging their heads. Matthew 27:35-40, "*And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."*

We are ready to look a 3rd time at this Psalm and see ourselves as Christian.

1. The Christian - The suffering king was accused, agonized, and prayed. (v.1-5)

We suffer. People accuse us falsely. It hurts. We agonize. We cry out to God not to be silent. We can relate.

2. The Christian - The suffering king spoke curses on God's enemy. (v.6-20)

Are there times when cursing is appropriate today?

The connection point for us and Psalm 109 is that while we must avoid personal revenge, there do exist circumstances in which people who speak on behalf of God and His church, could issue words of curse. What situations?

In extreme cases. People who have not lost much, do not see any occasion for calling down God's curses. But people who have been attacked and falsely accused are people who understand the expressions of curse in these psalms. The Psalms express rage, anger, and intolerance for situations of injustice with a deep desire to see justice re-established. The modern day Christian who is trying to figure out how to pray in the light of horrible events that are happening in our community, our country, and our world, are people who need a full Biblical understanding of evil, and God's answer to evil. When there are truly wicked things that happen, what is the proper response from a Christian who is very hungry for justice to be done?

We read a Psalm about a covenant king relating to a covenant God, and we are also covenant people who relate to a covenant God. Covenants have blessing, and covenants have curses! Every car battery has a positive terminal and a negative terminal. That is how they are built. Every covenant has blessings and curses; that is how they are set up. Curses are as much a part of covenant as a car battery has a negative pole.

Can Christians today speak curses? God said to Abraham in Genesis 12, that God would bless people who blessed Abraham, and the people who dishonor Abram, what would God do? God says that God would curse those people.

The coming of Christ as King did not do away with the covenant curses. The outlook of the Old Testament was that when God came to rescue His people, He would also destroy all of their enemies. Both happen on the same day. That day is the Day of the LORD. The day of the LORD is the final day, the day of judgment, the last day, the day of our salvation.

John the Baptist preached about this in Matthew 3:12, saying that God would gather His wheat into His barn, but would burn the chaff. God's salvation is on the wheat being gathered into the barn, but God's judgment is on the chaff being burned.

The day of salvation came when Jesus came. Jesus saved us by taking our place on the cross, by dying instead of us, by rising again, by ascending to heaven. The day of judgment has been delayed. That judgment will be carried out when Jesus comes again.

Until Jesus comes a second time, Jesus has commanded that we take the gospel of grace all throughout the world. People who hear the gospel do not need to be cursed by God as enemies, they do not need to be condemned and destroyed by God for their sins. Rather, what could actually happen is that God's enemies

could be converted, could be changed, could become friends of God, allies of God, children of God!

There is the use of curse in the New Testament. The apostles used curses. For example, when the gospel was under attack in Galatians 1:8-9, "...even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed." The word is anathema, to deliver someone over to divine wrath! The times when the NT uses curses it is for warning against apostasy, such as Hebrews chapters 6 and 10, and where church discipline had led to excommunication in Matthew 18 and in 1 Corinthians 5. The seriousness of false teaching and people falling into sin must not be underestimated. As officers of the church carry out their shepherding work, and their work of governing the church and church discipline, their desire is the blessing of reconciliation, but when that member does not repent, the officers become instruments of God's covenant curse. This is the work given by Christ Himself in 1 Peter 5, the call to exercise oversight and Matthew 16:19, that what is bound or loosed on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven. And we know that Jesus cursed the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 23.

3. The Christian - The suffering king put the whole matter into the hands of God. (v.21-31)

Remember the phrase "But God" in verse 21? Now think of Paul's statement in Ephesians 2, where verses 1-3 Paul explained the dreadful status of humanity, and then in verse 4, Paul wrote "...*but God*..." and then explained the powerful grace of God to make us alive in Christ and give us a seat with Christ in the heavenly places!

Our culture is crumbling, and the church is confused. But God.

David is not in a position of strength, power, and wealth, but rather had been reduced to a position of weakness, powerlessness, and poverty. David became weak physically, mentally, emotionally. What about when a Christian feels weak in all those same ways?

We are taught in Psalm 109 to pray based on God's character, not based on our own strength. We are too weak! God will need to take action for us!

Further, we are taught in Psalm 109 to anticipate times of public worship in the house of God, praising Him. God will get us through this. Our advisor is God our wisdom. Our advocate is God nearby, at our right hand. Our protector is God Almighty.

Peter wrote for the Christian in 1 Peter 2:19, "...*this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly....(v.21) for to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you might follow in His steps.*"

The last section of this Psalm is for the NT Christian just as much as the verses from Romans 8:31, since “...*God is for us, who can be against us?*”

Meanwhile, what about the wicked? The wicked still have time to repent of their sin and come to Christ. However, the judgments described in this psalm, and worse, are exactly what will come to the wicked eventually. Those who refuse to repent will arrive one day at the final judgment of God. Jesus Himself will be the judge presiding over every person on the final day. Psalm 109 is one of the places in the Bible that warns everyone how seriously God takes sin. This Psalm urges everyone to seek grace from God while grace is available. We preach to the wicked, and we pray for them, and after that, we put them in God’s hands. We do not take matters into our own hands. Ever.

Concluding application:

1) We give ourselves to prayer. Verse 4. David constantly prayed. Jesus constantly prayed. We are commanded to pray without ceasing. Especially when we are suffering, we are called to say I am prayer. Philippians 4:6-7, “...*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” Prayer is how we face problems, because prayer comforts us by making us aware of who is at our right hand – Jesus Himself. Prayer is how we get through, Philippians 4:12-13, “*I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*”

2) Expect suffering as an essential part of being a Christian.

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:12, “*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery [suffering] when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*”

SI – Mrs. Wilcox, gave an illustration of accepting our suffering: “While my husband Frank and I were living in Pakistan many years ago, our six-month-old baby died. An old man who heard of our grief came to comfort us. “A tragedy like this is similar to being plunged into boiling water,” he explained. “If you are an egg, your suffering will make you hard-boiled and unresponsive. If you are a potato, you will emerge soft and pliable, resilient and adaptable.” It may sound funny to God, but there have been times when I was suffering great pain, that I have prayed, “O Lord, let me be a potato.” Accept it when God calls you or a loved one to go through pain and suffering.

We end with words from Peter, 1 Peter 4:19, “*Therefore, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator, while doing good.*”