

The Plea against Oppressors

Text: Psalm 10:1-18

Introduction:

1. Psalm 10 contains a plea (presumably of David) to God concerning wicked oppressors. It is “an interesting blend of lament over the oppression of the wicked and triumphant jubilation at the prospect of divine judgment.” (Ross)
2. The message of the Psalm may be worded as follows: “After describing the frightening power of the wicked in their impiety towards God and their violence against the helpless, the psalmist appeals to the LORD, the sovereign King, to deliver the oppressed by destroying the wicked.” (Ross)
3. The message of the Psalm is timeless and speaks to every generation. Our hearts also yearn and cry out for deliverance from evil and evil men who at times seem to wield their evil power and influence with no apparent consequences. The Psalm begins with the perplexity of the heart about these matters (Vs. 1) but after a lengthy description of the character of wicked oppressors (Vs. 2-11), moves to the position of faith and trust in God (Vs. 12-18).
4. We will divide the Psalm under three headings for our expository study.

I. THE PROFILE OF THE WICKED OPPRESSOR (VS. 1-11)

The Psalm opens with an expression of perplexity by the Psalmist and then moves to a detailed description of the evil character and actions of the wicked.

A. The Question of the Psalmist (Vs. 1)

1. ‘Why’ – the Psalms deal with many of the ‘why’ questions of the Christian life. We find echoes of our own heart struggles in the inspired pages of the Psalms. It is not sinful to ask ‘why’ questions so long as we take them to the Lord and ultimately arrive at biblical thinking. This is how the Psalm ends (See Vs. 12-18).
2. The thing the Psalmist was grappling with here was the apparent distance of God in times of trouble. It appeared God was standing afar off and hiding Himself. From the human perspective it appeared that God was indifferent to what was going on and wouldn’t intervene.
3. The apparent silence and hiddenness of God is something believers have struggled down through the centuries to this day. “Maybe it is the hiding of his face, even more than the trouble, which perplexes His saints at times.” (Flanigan) We need to remember that our perception is not reality. In reality, God is not distant from us, neither is he indifferent to our troubles in a world of evil and evil men. God is always a very present help in trouble and His hiding of Himself temporarily is but part of His plan and purpose for our ultimate good. As Spurgeon says, “The refiner is never very far from the mouth of the furnace when his gold is in the fire.”

B. The Description of the Wicked (Vs. 2-11)

The detailed description of the wicked is a further outworking of the question of verse 1. In light of the evil character and action of the wicked, how can God not intervene? We can divide the Psalmist’s detailed description of the wicked into several categories. The wicked are described as being:

1. Proudful and Irreverent (Vs. 2-6)

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Not surprisingly, the description of the wicked begins with his arrogance and pride. Pride is evil and yet many wear it as a badge of honour in our day! His pride leads him to:

- a. Persecute the poor (Vs. 2). When the wicked oppressor sees someone poor and vulnerable, he sees an opportunity for exploitation rather than compassion. His pride and feeling of self-importance leads him to view the poor as being below him in status and therefore legitimate targets for his evil desires. The Psalmist adds a prayer here that the wicked will be snared in their own traps. Psalm 9:15 "The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken."
- b. Flaunt his depraved desires (Vs. 3)
 - i. He boasts of wicked desires (Vs. 3a). The wicked glory in that of which they ought to be ashamed. We are living in a day when society in general has become so wicked, people not only live sinful lifestyles openly, they brazenly flaunt and promote it!
 - ii. He blesses what God hates (Vs. 3b). We are reminded of the words of Isaiah 5:20 "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"
- c. Reject his Maker (Vs. 4-5) There are two aspects to this:
 - i. He refuses God (Vs. 4a). Pride is the root cause behind his unwillingness to seek God. To seek God would require humility and this is an affront to his pride and self-sufficiency. Sadly, many will be in hell one day simply because they let their pride hinder them from receiving salvation.
 - ii. He ignores God (Vs. 4b). There is no room in his thoughts for God. He is entirely secular. His thoughts are so consumed with his sinful ideas and plans he has no room to give thought to the God to whom he owes his life, breath and everything. The next verse says that God's judgments are "far about out of his sight" (Vs. 5). He lives as if God doesn't exist. What a description of the average Aussie! What a tragic way to live where the mind is only occupied with the depraved and not the glorious, Divine truths of the Word of God. Note: The work of the soul-winner is to bring God and His truth back into the consciousness of the sinner.
 - iii. He lives without reference to God (Vs. 5). A life devoid of thoughts of God bears bitter fruit. It is a life that will easily be filled with sinful practices as there is little restraint from the conscient. The wicked oppressor's life is continually 'grievous'. The root word has the idea of "to twist, pervert". There is no sense of God's Divine justice – "thy judgments are far above out of his sight". He scoffs at his enemies (in this context the righteous) – "he puffeth at them". "The word rendered "puffeth" means to breathe, to blow; and the idea here is, that he acted as though he could sweep them away with a breath." (Barnes)
- d. Indulge in smug self-confidence (Vs. 6). The Psalmist exposes the inner thoughts of such a wicked person. Because of their prosperity and advantage over others, they believe themselves to be unmovable

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and that they will never experience hardship. His pride has led to self-deception. He has forgotten that God will judge him for his sin and that the law of sowing and reaping will one day disrupt his false peace and tranquillity.

2. Depraved and Deceitful (Vs. 7)

The depravity of his heart finds expression through his lips. "...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Matt. 12:34; Lk. 6:45) What comes out of your mouth reveals what is in your heart.

a. What's in his mouth (Vs. 7a)

- i. Cursing – his mouth is full of profanity and blasphemy.
- ii. Deceit – his words cannot be trusted. He will lie to achieve his perverted goals and ambitions.
- iii. Fraud – a subset of deception. Whereas the word 'deceit' is a broad word that covers all kinds of dishonesty, fraud is a specific form of deception. Webster defines it as "Deceit; deception; trick; artifice by which the right or interest of another is injured; a stratagem intended to obtain some undue advantage; an attempt to gain or the obtaining of an advantage over another by imposition or immoral means, particularly deception in contracts, or bargain and sale, either by stating falsehoods, or suppressing truth."

b. What's under his tongue (Vs. 7b)

The picture alludes to serpents "who have little bags of poison under their teeth (Gill). Psalm 140:3 "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison *is* under their lips. Selah." While some sins of the tongue are obvious (they fill his mouth), there are others that lie dangerously hidden that can strike an unsuspecting victim. Poisonous words can bring a lot of hurt and damage into someone's life.

- i. Mischief – the word here means "to labour, toil; then trouble, vexation, sorrow. The meaning here seems to be that there lies under the tongue that which gives or causes distress; to wit, wrong-doing; injustice to others." (Barnes) In old English the word 'mischief' didn't carry the light connotation we often attach to the word today. It meant "intentional injury; harm or damage done by design" (Webster's 1828)
- ii. Vanity – empty, worthless; having no substance, value or importance.

3. Murderous and Predatory (Vs. 8-11)

The Psalmist now uses the figure of a beast of prey who lurks ready to pounce on its unsuspecting victim. Because lives of the wicked are under the control and influence of Satan, the roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), they reflect the malicious character of their master. Like the devil, they are murderous but at the same time very deceitful and cunning. Look at the various ways the Psalmist describes this aspect of wicked man's character:

- a. He sits in the "lurking places of the villages" (Vs. 8a). The "lurking places" refer to places of ambush. This is not an open confrontation but a secret attack.
- b. He murders the innocent in the "secret places" (means concealed places). (Vs. 8b) They carry out their abominations in a hidden manner.

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- c. His eyes are "privily set against the poor" (Vs. 8c). His eyes are looking for an evil opportunity but he hides this evil intention.
- d. He lies in wait "secretly as a lion in his den" (Vs. 9a, 10). What a picture of wicked oppressors and what a picture of the devil himself who lurks in the shadows, waiting for an opportunity to pounce on your life and destroy it. The picture is reinforced in verse 10 with the added detail that he also has "strong ones" who are allied with him in his evil work. He is a part of a coalition of evil. The cause of wickedness has many friends!
- e. He ensnares the poor like a hunter with his net (Vs. 9b). Here the figure changes from that of a lion lurking for its prey to that of a hunter trapping its prey. There are wicked people who will look for ways to exploit the vulnerable. There is also an application here that the wicked will target those who are godly (poor in spirit) and try to lure them into sin.
- f. He believes lies about the character of God (Vs. 11). The heart of the wicked is exposed in this passage. Note the reference to the heart in verse 3 ("heart's desire"), verse 6 ("he hath said in his heart"), verse 11 ("he hath said in his heart") and verse 13 ("he hath said in his heart"). He has deceived himself into denying the Omniscience (all knowingness of God) and the Omnipresence of God. It is a sobering reminder that we can speak lies to ourselves and become self-deceived if we are not yielded to God's truth. May God help us to have "truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51:6).

II. THE PRAYER CONCERNING THE WICKED OPPRESSOR (VS. 12-15)

The tone of the Psalm shifts from looking at the darkness of the wicked to looking to God in faith to deal with the situation. "With verse 12 we have an abrupt break in the tone of the psalm – a change from lamentation to confident supplication."

(Ross) Notice four features of the Psalmist's prayer:

A. The Appeal of his Prayer (Vs. 12)

1. The boldness of it – "Arise, O LORD". We do not command God in prayer but when we understand something of His character as revealed in His Word, we can ask for things with boldness.
2. The details of it – "O God, lift up thine hand, forget not the humble". He asks God to intervene in the situation to relieve the humble from the wicked oppressors.

B. The Argument of his Prayer (Vs. 13)

1. The Psalmist's appeal is focused on the honour of His God. It concerns him that his God is being misrepresented and slandered by the wicked. Why should the reviling of the wicked go unanswered? We are reminded of the words of the previous Psalm – "Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men." (Psalm 9:19-20)
2. Prayer that is concerned with the reputation and honour of God is powerful praying.

C. The Assurance of his Prayer (Vs. 14)

1. God had seen (Vs. 14a)

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- a. The Psalmist refutes the lie of the wicked man described in verse 11. God had seen the evil activities of the wicked and he would judge in righteousness.
- b. The word 'requite' means to repay, avenge. God is the perfect judge and He will judge.
2. God would help (Vs. 14b)
God is:
 - a. The helper of the poor – “the poor committeth himself unto thee”. The poor could confidently commit their cause to God with assurance that He would work.
 - b. The helper of the fatherless – “thou art the helper of the fatherless”. God reveals a special concern for the fatherless, the poor and widows in His Word. To take advantage of the vulnerable is a serious offence against God.

D. The Asking in his Prayer (Vs. 15)

The writer prays for two things in this verse. He asks God to:

1. Break the power of the wicked (Vs. 15a). The arm represents strength so he is praying that God would break the power of wicked men so that they will not be able to carry out their evil plans.
2. Bring a purging of wickedness (Vs. 15b) He is praying “that God should search out every trace of evil in the tyrant and judge it, until nothing remains.” (Flanigan) When we pray for Christ to “come quickly”, we are essentially praying for this. When Christ comes, he will judge the world and ultimately remove wickedness entirely.

III. THE PERSPECTIVE IN REFERENCE TO THE WICKED OPPRESSOR (VS. 16-18)

The language of faith continues as the Psalmist expresses unreserved confidence in his God. The “why” question of verse 1 is being answered with the eyes of faith. His faith gives him wisdom and perspective on the situation he has described in reference to the wicked. These truths bring comfort and peace to the heart troubled over the state of affairs in a wicked world.

A. God is on the Throne (Vs. 16)

1. He is the Eternal King – “The LORD is King for ever and ever”. Earthly kingdoms come and go but our God is the Great, Everlasting, Unchangeable King. This is a great comfort to the soul. Evil men often appear like they are in control but in reality, God reigns and His plan for the course of this universe will come to pass in His perfect way and timing.
2. He is the Sovereign King – “the heathen are perished out of thy land”. Notice how the earth is referred to as “his land”. The Psalmist sees a future day free from the wicked with the eye of faith. We know that this will only be fully realized when Christ returns to rule and reign.

B. God Hears and Answers Prayer (Vs. 17-18)

1. In verse 1 the Psalmist had expressed his struggle over the apparent distance of God. Now he affirms that in reality God was near, God had seen, God had heard and God would answer.
2. God would “prepare their heart”. The word ‘prepare’ means “to fix, establish, make firm”. God would settle and confirm the hearts of his people and allay their fears. We need that ministry of God in our hearts when we find ourselves in “times of trouble” (Vs. 1).

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3. God would hear the fatherless and oppressed and work to deal with the oppressors (Vs. 18).

Conclusion:

1. Theological lessons (what we learn about God)

- God is a just, holy and righteous God who WILL judge sinful men.
- God hears the cries of His children, even though at times his answers seem to be delayed from the human standpoint. In reality, God always answers on time and is always near!
- God has tender mercy and compassion for the vulnerable.

2. Practical/Spiritual lessons (what we learn about the Christian life)

- Believers will sometimes deal with doubts in their walk of faith. There are why questions that will arise that need to be worked out in the presence of God. At such times we would do well to sing, "When darkness seems to veil His face, I rest on his unchanging grace; In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil."
- Believers face a world that is wicked and hostile to their faith. The devil and his agents will seek their destruction but God will preserve and keep them as they trust in Him.