

Judgment and Salvation

A Sermon on Psalm 58

by

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1. Introduction

2. The Occasion for Judgment (vv. 1-5).

- a. “Do you indeed speak righteousness, O gods? Do you judge uprightly, O sons of men? No, in heart you work unrighteousness; on earth you weigh out the violence of your hands. The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth. They have venom like the venom of a serpent; like a deaf cobra that stops its ear, so that it does not hear the voice of charmers, or a skillful caster of spells” (vv. 1-5).
 - i. The psalmist begins by laying out a series of complaints before God about the wicked.
 1. It is important to know these are men who are judges or rulers in the psalmist’s day.
 - a. Some of your translations will use the term “gods” in verse 1, because in the Hebrew, the term is “Elohim.”
 - b. The word “Elohim” is most often used to refer to God Himself in the Old Testament, but on occasion, it is used of people in authority.
 2. These men are being called to judgment because they have abused the role they have been given by God.
 - a. It is no surprise to find that this is the case; this is often a problem with those who come into authority.
 - b. The psalmist outlines in precise ways how they have perverted the Law of God.

- i. They have been given to unjust speech (v. 1).
 - ii. They rule with partiality, which just simply means they are showing favoritism in their court decisions, rather than treating equal before the eyes of the Law (v. 1).
 - iii. They have had wayward hearts from birth, meaning they do not place themselves under the authority of God (vv. 2-3).
 - iv. They have violent hands, so they are quick to shed blood (v. 2).
 - v. They have lying tongues (v. 3).
 - vi. They also have destructive tongues, meaning their speech leads to the ruin of others (v. 4).
 - vii. And they are found to be the epitome of pride (v. 5), for they do not humble themselves and listen to God.
 3. The whole point of this indictment is to leave no question about the nature and character of their authority.
 - a. In verse one, notice he asks two rhetorical questions—the obvious answer is that they have failed.
 - b. In every single aspect, these are men who have climbed to the top to rule over others in complete lawlessness and wickedness.
- ii. There is much more to it than the rulers identified in this psalm have perverted the Law of God.
 1. Notice how he asks the rhetorical questions in verse one, only to answer them in verse two.
 - a. Their entire demeanor runs contrary to the Word of God and it bleeds into everything they do.

- b. It is from the heart that the psalmist identifies their primary problem—yet this is the fundamental problem of all mankind.
 - c. The problem runs even deeper though; from conception, they have gone astray from God.
 - d. Their way is the way of liars; the truth is not in them.
 - e. As a result, they are likened to serpents who cannot and will not listen to reason.
 - f. He goes on to liken their speech to the venom of serpents in verse 4—but they are not ones to be tamed by the snake charmer and defanged.
2. The fundamental “problem” with imprecatory psalms is that we often read them as if we are the innocent party.
 - a. Reality hits a bit closer to home when we start to truthfully examine our own lives.
 - b. The apostle James says much the same of people who claim faith in Jesus Christ when he indicts them for the same things.
 3. What it ultimately reveals is that we do not think God is truly as holy as He says He is—and we do not yet see that the wrath of God is not a game, and that sin is cosmic treason.

3. The Call for Judgment (vv. 6-9)

a. Destroy Their Weapons, Lord (v. 6)

- i. “O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth; break out the fangs of the young lions, O Yahweh” (v. 6).

1. The curses being called down upon these rulers now are a classic example of the punishment fitting the crime.

2. They have used their mouths to pervert justice and destroy the people of God, and so he simply calls upon God to end it.
- ii. The idea is that they will no longer be able to wag their vicious, lying tongues and destroy the people of God.
 1. He is asking that the Lord would take vengeance upon the wicked because God has promised that sin must be judged.
 2. This goes all the way back to the promises given to Abraham in Genesis 12.
- b. Let Them Be No More, Lord (vv. 7-9)
- i. “Let them flow away like water that runs off; when he aims his arrows, let them be as headless shafts. Let them be as a snail which melts away as it goes along, like the miscarriages of a woman which never see the sun. Before your pots can feel the fire of thorns He will sweep them away with a whirlwind, the green and the burning alike” (vv. 7-9).
 1. There is much going on here that needs a little explanation, but the basic gist of it is that he is asking for them to die.
 2. Verse 9 is incredibly difficult to convey because of how this whole sentence breaks out in the Hebrew.
 - a. What’s being described here is like a man who has gathered timber for the fire.
 - b. In essence, what is being described is that whether the wicked are in the prime of life or have reached a ripe old age, they will be swept away in the torrent of God’s wrath.
 - ii. Their judgment will come. It will be final, horrendous, and they shall never again prey on the righteous—God will take vengeance, and that’s the *major* point.

1. Just like we have seen that the wrath of God is never poured out without reason, we see now that sin is ultimately never without severe consequences.
 - a. More than this, we see that God is the Bringer of those consequences.
 - b. Many like to think that God will not bring them to face justice in this life or the next.
2. For all who are not found in Jesus Christ, the fulness of wrath will be poured out upon them, and God will be vindicated in the perfect execution of His justice.
 - a. For the Christian though, our response is not one of glee or gloating, but to be a blessing to those who curse us, for vengeance belongs to God.
 - b. Yet the reason is not as we might think: it is that the wrath of God might come to full measure on the wicked when it is poured out.

4. The Joy of Judgment (vv. 10-11)

- a. The Righteous Will Be Avenged and True Justice Goes Forth (vv. 10-11).
 - i. “The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. And men will say, “Surely, there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth!”
 1. The scene depicted here shows that the enemy will be utterly slaughtered, and the righteous will walk through a battlefield steeped in their blood.
 2. The amount of blood is startling, to say the least: the righteous will bathe their feet in the blood of their foes, and this will bring them joy.
 - ii. Yet the rejoicing is not merely that the wicked have been defeated; the righteous will rejoice that what they have believed by faith will be made known to all the earth.
 1. We ought not try to tone down the language here for fear that it might offend some.

- a. The reality is that the righteous will rejoice when the wicked are judged and justice has finally been accomplished.
 - b. In our world, it seems as if the wicked always get away with a life of rebellion toward God.
 2. But the righteous will be completely vindicated for their life of faith in God and His Word.
- b. What this time depicts is the time of final judgment—but it also depicts the time of final salvation.
- i. When the day God’s righteous wrath from heaven is revealed against all ungodliness, the Christian will not find themselves under the wrath of God.
 1. Instead, what you and I will see is that the Lord will deliver on His promise to save us to the uttermost.
 - a. For the Christian, this is a thing of much hope and will be a great time of rejoicing.
 - b. But we ought to never forget that this will be a time of great upheaval.
 2. While many may look to the time of judgment with utter glee, it ought to instead fill us with a sense of sobriety.
 - a. Understand, that is not merely a time where your political and social opponents will be judged.
 - b. The judgment of God indeed will fall upon unjust rulers, but it will also fall upon your unbelieving family and friends.
 - ii. The joy of judgment is ultimately bound up in the fact that the righteous can have confidence God will deal justly with all people.

1. While wickedness may seem to pay off in the here and now, it will not pay off in the end. Only the righteous shall receive a reward.
2. No one will be able to stand in complaint, for everything that God does on that final day will not only be fair, it will be good and right.

5. Conclusion

Benediction: May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. May He keep you strong to the very end, so that you will be free from blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.