

The Severity and Kindness of God

A Sermon on Psalm 59

by

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1. Introduction

2. God Declares His Judgment Against All Nations (vv. 1-5).

a. “Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; set me securely on high away from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from those who do iniquity and save me from bloodshed. For behold, they have set an ambush for my life; fierce men launch an attack against me, not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord, for no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me” (vv. 1-4a).

i. The psalm begins like many others before it, where we find our psalmist in the throes of trouble yet again.

1. His immediate in verse 1 is an urgent plea for salvation.

2. He cries out to God to deliver him and place him on high so he’s completely out of harm’s way.

ii. The reason for it is plain enough, as his enemies are seeking to kill him.

1. The initial description of his enemies is that they are “those who do iniquity” and men of bloodshed.

a. They have set an ambush for his life—they are plotting and scheming to find the perfect opportunity to pour out their bloodlust.

b. They are fierce men, or rather, mighty warriors, who launch attacks against him.

2. Yet the psalmist is innocent. In three separate ways he identifies that he is being persecuted without reason.
 - a. Verse 3: not for my transgression.
 - b. Verse 3 again: not for my sin.
 - c. Verse 4: for no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me.
 - d. All he's showing is that he has a genuine reason to cry out to God, as he hasn't invited this upon himself.
- b. "Arouse Yourself to help me, and see! You, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to punish all the nations; do not be gracious to any who are treacherous in iniquity" (vv. 4b-5).
 - i. This highlights the terrible reality of judgment and wrath that hangs over all the earth.
 1. The psalmist looks beyond his own immediate circumstances to see that every man, woman, and child on earth is just the same as those who haunt him.
 - a. What he calls for is startling, if we truly understand the scope of what he's saying.
 - b. He is asking that God withhold His grace, and battle against the wicked.
 2. The reason for this is simple: God is able to look upon His own creation and discern the extent of man's wickedness.
 - a. It is reminiscent of the Flood in Genesis 6; God examines His own creation and He *saw* that the wickedness of man was great on the earth.
 - b. The psalmist invites this same kind of inspection upon the nations.
 - ii. The only reason why God has not destroyed all the earth even today is that He has not yet set His consuming gaze upon the hearts of men.
 1. It is only because of the sheer sovereign choice of God that this world has not fallen into His severe wrath.

2. God has declared this day to come though, and despite how we seek to deny the impending doom, it is written on the hearts of men.
 - a. It appears in popular culture whenever you see a story that depicts the fall of the world.
 - b. Despite these things, man delays in his repentance, while the wrath of God continues to build.

3. God Derides the Wicked in Their Arrogance (vv. 6-8).

- a. “They return at evening, they howl like a dog, and go around the city. Behold they belch forth with their mouth; swords are in their lips, for they say, ‘Who hears?’” (vv. 6-7).
 - i. While the psalmist continues to describe the men hunting him down—this indictment still goes to all the nations.
 1. All of mankind is like a wild, rabid dog, who is on the prowl around the gates of the city.
 2. They foam at the mouth in anticipation of sinking their teeth into the flesh of another.
 - ii. He says, “Swords are in their lips,” but not merely because they speak with hatred toward him or even other people. Notice the reason why:
 1. They ask the question, “Who hears?” and that is the same question that has been on the heart of every man since birth.
 2. But the question “Who hears?” is born out of a heart of pride.
 - a. The prideful man fools himself into believing that God truly does not see him in his sin.
 - b. The warning of this wrath to come cannot be ignored—and the remedy for the proud at heart is to flee to Christ.

- b. “But You, O Lord, laugh at them; you scoff at all the nations” (v. 8).
- i. In contrast to what the wicked tell themselves to ignore the wrath to come, God does indeed hear them.
 - 1. God looks upon the nations and sees their hearts, and all that is within them is pride.
 - 2. Pride is ultimately the rejection of God for who He is, but all this makes mankind is a puny rebel.
 - 3. Yet the point cannot be missed: when the proud-hearted rise up against God, He does not take them even remotely seriously.
 - a. The fact that God laughs at the wicked and scorns their attempts should cause each and every person to stand in fear before Him, yet we do not.
 - b. What we fail to realize is that when we rebel against God, we have declared war—but it is a war we have no chance at winning, and this is why He scoffs at the wicked!
 - ii. The feeble attempts of mankind to throw off the shackles of religion and be free from the rule of God only plays out in one way.
 - 1. Psalm 2 deals with this reality of men who rise up against their Maker in rebellion.
 - 2. God calls upon the nations to worship Christ with fear and trembling, yet they reject Him in their arrogance.
 - a. Yet the resounding warning is much the same as our psalm today: God shall become angry, and His wrath may soon be kindled.

- b. Over and again, the Day of Judgment is said to be near, and this is a reality that God Himself knows all too well. But this is not the only God's wrath is expressed.

4. God Disperses Living Examples of His Wrath (vv. 9-11).

- a. "Because of his strength I will watch for You, for God is my stronghold. My God in His lovingkindness will meet me; God will let me look triumphantly upon my foes" (vv. 10-11).
 - i. Everything in the psalm is now coming together in a burning focus.
 - 1. God is indeed the one who will deliver the psalmist and keep him safe in His grace—but that grace is displayed in a particular way.
 - 2. Remember: the psalmist frames things in verse 5 in terms of God's power, might, and faithfulness to His covenant, and that means judgment.
 - ii. The psalmist looks to this reality, sees that God is utterly faithful to His covenant promises to Israel, and says, "You will let me look upon my enemies in triumph."
- b. As the psalmist calls God his "stronghold," he is using a term that implies far more than we might think in hearing that term.
 - i. God is not merely a defensive outpost who keeps his children safe from their enemies.
 - 1. He is the One who goes before them in battle and wages war. He is the warrior-king.
 - 2. The psalmist looks upon God in all His might and power and simply says in verse 10, "My God in His lovingkindness will meet me."
 - a. The point is simple: God's lovingkindness, in this case, will show itself in the judgment of the wicked.
 - b. He anticipates not only that wrath is coming, but it will be a day where he finally triumphs because God defeated every last one of his enemies.

- ii. “Do not slay them, or my people will forget; scatter them by Your power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield” (v. 11).
 - 1. He knows that when the Lord comes to battle, there is no battle. Remember, God laughs at the wicked’s attempt to ignore Him.
 - a. The psalmist is not content to see them fall into complete ruin and death—there is something more important in mind.
 - b. He wants the wicked to become living examples of how God deals in justice.
 - 2. Many ask the question: why is our world so evil? I would contend they have forgotten that the wrath of God against mankind is being displayed through this.
 - a. Romans 1 refers to this reality when Paul describes the human condition, as a current revelation of the wrath of God from heaven.
 - b. This serves as a continual reminder, where we can see both the severity and the kindness of God on display
 - c. What you ultimately see is both the kindness and severity of God on display in this.

5. God Dethrones the Proud at Heart (vv. 12-13).

- a. “On account of the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be caught in their pride, and on account of curses and lies which they utter. Destroy them in wrath, destroy them that they may be no more; that men may know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth” (vv. 12-13).
 - i. In these two short verses, what comes is only summed up under the phrase, “The punishment fits the crime.”

1. They were men of great pride, fooling themselves into thinking they could lie, commit murder, tear others down with their tongues, and more.
 2. Yet the psalmist calls for their utter destruction, on account of their own wickedness.
- ii. Yet the verdict against sin must come, and come it shall.
1. The true pity for us is that we can make all kinds of justifications for our “lesser sins,” but notice the reasons given for judgment.
 - a. The sins of their mouth and the words of their lips speak to the fact that they are perverse in their speech—and this isn’t about swearing.
 - b. They are filled with pride.
 - c. Third, they speak curses and lies.
 2. Though they were murderous and treasonous men—their judgment is for those ordinary sins we so often live with on a daily basis.
 - a. Yet what it testifies to is the utterly serious and deadly reality of the judgment that comes against sin.
 - b. These are the sins that put you and I as the soul hanging precariously over the ledge of Hell.
- b. Yet the larger reality behind all of this is found at the end of verse 13: “that men may know that God rules in Jacob to the ends of the earth.”
- i. The simple reason why God judges sin with the purest of hatred is that He is the Ruler over all.
 1. He has created this world and set the Laws in place. He has even written these Laws upon our hearts so that we are all without excuse.

2. That is the predominant point here; God will display that He is the Sovereign Ruler over all the earth and that all men must give account to Him.

ii. When the wrath of God is displayed, it highlights the single most important truth in all the world: there is a God who is King over all and we have rebelled against Him.

6. God Divides the Wicked from the Righteous (vv. 14-17).

a. “They return at evening, they howl like a dog, and go around the city. They wander about for food and growl if they are not satisfied. But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, for You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to You; for God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness” (vv. 14-17).

i. The point in this section is rather simple; there are only two types of people in this world.

ii. Despite all of our own categories of separation, the wrath of God cleanly divides people into one of two camps: the wicked and the righteous.

1. The wicked, on the Day of wrath, will be like the stray dog, who wanders aimlessly in the night, lacking any and all blessing from God.

2. Yet for the righteous, their fate will be a radically different one, where they sing songs of His faithfulness to save, but also to judge.

b. What seems to be a polarizing issue for us is not all that difficult when you consider some rather simple realities.

i. From the beginning, God has warned all of mankind of the judgment to come.

ii. Yet from the beginning, God has also provided a way for men to be saved.

7. Conclusion

Benediction: He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen (Rev. 22:20-21).