

Psalm 10 “The Justice of Injustice?”

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Like most, I have been totally consumed with the national events of the last weeks. My stomach was sickened over the death of Mr. George Floyd, 46-year-old African American who died because of police brutality. We were all shocked and disgusted by the video of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling with his knee on Floyd’s neck for 8 minutes and 45 seconds, while three other officers stood by complicity. The tragedy sparked national protests in cities all over the country. Which is right and good. I am a Protestant minister. The Protestant Reformation was marked by protests. *Protest* is the root word in *Protestant*. Peaceful protest is a constitutional right. Sadly, radicals took over the protests instigating lawlessness, violence, plunging cities into total anarchy. Requiring curfews in many American cities including our own great city of Atlanta. The looting of stores, the burning of CNN Center. Including in D.C., the historic St. John’s Episcopal Church—the church of presidents—even the desecration of the Lincoln Memorial.

These events have invited a national conversation on race. Which is healthy and long overdue. Radicals claim that the violence was justice. Justice for injustice displayed against African-Americans over centuries of slavery, segregation, Jim Crow laws, lack of civil rights, and equal opportunity. Justice for injustice. In our text today, we have a case of justice for injustice. When we examine the text, we learn that *because God will execute justice for injustice, then you should believe in Christ that you might not perish but have everlasting life.*

Context

This psalm doesn’t have a superscription revealing the author as many do. For example, the prior psalm: *To the Choirmaster: According to Muth-Labben. A Psalm of David* (Psalm 9). Yet Psalm 10 has no superscription, no title. We can’t speak definitively about the identity of the author. However, many scholars believe that David penned this psalm. For in the Septuagint Psalm 9 and Psalm 10 are one psalm, not divided, indicating Davidic authorship. Even so, we still don’t know anything about the context, where this falls in the life of David. Yet the topic of the psalm is clear. Summarized in the last verse. The psalmist takes comfort in the assurance that God will *do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more* (18). The psalmist is concerned about justice for the oppressed. That is the topic of the psalm. Justice for the oppressed because of the injustice that is so prevalent in his country from sea to shining sea.

The List of Injustices

So in verses 2-11 he reviews it all. He catalogs the injustices. Which is easy to do for it is all over the news. We cannot look at every injustice, but a few. What do the headlines read? *Verse 2, In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.* The poor are pursued by the wicked and caught in their evil schemes. The Hebrew verb is translated as *hunts down*. The wicked hunt down the poor like a hunter trapping his game in a net. Revolting, because God is concerned for the poor. The poor are protected by

God. Via protections encoded within national law of ancient Israel. For example, when harvesting a wheat field, the law prohibits going over the field a second time, scrapping as called in the South. Whatever stalks are missed must be reserved for the poor to harvest for themselves. But wicked don't leave the scraps for the poor. Instead they hunt down the poor.

What is the wicked like? Verse 4, *In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."* The wicked is an atheist. Atheism is not a modern phenomenon which arises in the twentieth century. Atheism is as old as human existence east of Eden. The man is an atheist even though the nation claims belief in God. The national God is Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. I AM WHO I AM. The self-existing God. The independently existing God. He depends upon nothing for His existence. He existed in the nothingness before He ever created. Even though printed on the national currency, the national slogan states, "In God we trust," not so for the wicked. He asserts that there is no God.

Totally irrational given all the evidence for God in the creation. *Since the beginning of the world, God's invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature are clearly perceived through what has been made so that all men are without excuse* (Rom. 1:20). But what does the wicked do with the evidence of God in creation? *He suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. He exchanges the truth of for a lie.* So dangerous. You "curve in on yourself" (Luther). Like a viscous cycle. The more you exchange the truth for a lie the more you begin to like the lie. The more you like the lie the more addicted you become to the lie. The more addicted to the lie the more unbreakable the bondage to the lie. The unbreakable bondage hardens the heart making it impossible for the wicked to ever see any ontological evidence for God in the creation. Indeed, the person is spiritually blind to the evidence of God in the book of nature. Worse, he is willfully blind. He enjoys his blindness. Because he thinks that it provides an excuse to defy God, to refuse giving worship and adoration and thanks and praise. As a result of his spiritual blindness, *they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.* The darkness of his depraved mind renders him incapable of understanding true reality. So he invents for himself an alternative reality, a delusional reality of a godless world. "The world got here by itself. Spontaneous explosion, gravity, random mutation and natural selection, and here we are. There is no God."

It is his atheistic worldview that leads to his warped sense of justice. In a world without God, there is no reason for justice. No warrant. Why pursue justice? Because the universe doesn't care? Because we'll all be dead in 100 years? Because life has no meaning? What warrant is there for justice? Moreover, in a godless world God, there is no overarching standard for justice. How do you measure justice? By what standard? Nature? Nature provides no standard for justice. Nature is red in tooth and claw. In nature, the lion eats the zebra. Is that right or wrong? By what standard do measure justice? Matter in motion doesn't provide a standard for justice. Really, the question is by *whose* standard? Whose justice? So we are back to the book of Judges when there was no king in Israel, *Everyone did what is right in his own eyes.* Break into cities, steal, loot, pillage, plunder, vandalize, riot, murder *Everyone did what is right in his own eyes.* That is the question, justice in the eyes of whom? That of the lynch mob? The justice of the anarchist? The justice of the looters? Whose justice? Whoever is stronger. That is the justice you get in a godless world. Might makes right. Survival of the fittest. Pure Darwinism.

But in world with God, the real world, there is an absolute standard for justice. Because justice is an attribute of God. God is not simply concerned for justice. God is just. Justice is identical to His Being. When we talk about the attributes of God we do not mean that God is

composed of attributes. He is not made up of attributes as if He is one part love, one part holy, one part truth. No. God is His attributes. God is love, God is holy, God is just. His attributes are identical to His being. That is what provides a standard for absolute justice: God's Being, reflected in His holy, just Moral Law, the Ten Commandments. *You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness.* The commandments reflect God's Being. They flow from His nature. Why is it unjust to murder? Because God Is and man is made in the image of God. To assault an image-bearer is to attack the One whose image is reflected. Why is it unjust to lie? Because God is truth. In a world with God, the real world, there is an absolute standard for justice. But in the delusional world of the wicked who says, "There is no God," then there is no absolute standard for justice. *Everyone did what is right in his own eyes.* Personal preference.

What is right for the wicked? What is his justice? *Verse 7, His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression.* Oppression comes out of the mouth of the wicked. He speaks oppression. He articulates oppression. You might not hear it. Because he wears a mask. But only to virtue signal. Like the Pharisees. Their long robes signaled self-righteousness. So his mask signals his virtue. But he is not virtuous. Behind the mask, his mouth is filled with oppression. Teach children, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Untrue. Words do hurt and oppress. Racial slurs. The N-word. The words of the Three-Fifths Compromise within the U.S. Constitution which counts three out of five slaves as people, three-fifths a person, three-fifths human. Oppressive words. Or the wording of Jim Crow laws which state that "No person of the Negro race may purchase property" here. Words which reflect systemic racism. Institutional racism. Hate speech reflecting hateful hearts written by men whose love for God must be questioned. How can you hate you brother whom you have seen and love God whom you have not seen? Do not say that you love God if you hate your brother. *If someone says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar* (1 Jn. 4:20). For you cannot hate you brother whom you have seen and love God whom you have not seen.

What else does the wicked do? He does *what is right in his own eyes.* What is justice in his eyes? *Verse 8, He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent.* He is described as a highwayman. Like those in the Parable of the Good Samaritan on the road to Jericho. Who hide out and ambush the innocent traveler. So too the wicked murders the innocent. As recently seen in Georgia in the case of Ahmaud Arbery, 25-year-old black man, who in February while jogging through a subdivision was ambushed. They were waiting for him. He tried to run. They hunted him down and shot him to death. That is the news coverage about the injustice in the country.

The Psalmist's Response: Faith-Crisis

So how does the psalmist respond? *Verse 1, Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?* The psalmist questions God. Often we hear well-intentioned folk say, "You should never question God. Never ask *why?*" The psalmist does and he is inspired by the Holy Spirit. To say that we should never ask *why?* presents a challenge to the inspiration of Scripture. Clearly the inspired psalmist questions God. *Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?* Here we are in this time of trouble. Why are you so remote, distanced, removed? Why so hidden? In other words, "Where are you?" That is the question. The poor are exploited. This one people group is oppressed. Racists get away with murder. Where are you, God? For David, the false appearance of reality

seemingly contradicts the real reality of God. The experience confronts him with a crisis of faith. His faith is assailed, attacked and dogged by doubt.

Perhaps this might be an encouragement to some of us who struggle with wavering faith. We have been influenced by this idea of the so-called “victorious Christian life.” That once you come to faith in Christ, you live a life of victory. All your problems are solved. Healthy, wealthy. Sit out by the pool in a lawn chair. But here is David experiencing spiritual anguish, despair, doubt. The injustice that he sees challenges his faith. For it doesn’t make sense. It contradicts his basic assumptions of reality. For according to the Hebrew worldview, God rewards righteousness and punishes wickedness. As revealed in the first Psalm, the introduction to the Psalter. *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked...He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Not so the wicked, but they are like chaff that the wind drives away* (Psalm 1). So according to the Hebrew worldview, the righteous prosper, the wicked suffer. But here the situation is totally reversed. The wicked prosper while the righteous suffer. The injustice of it all plunges David into a *faith-crisis*. He cannot rationalize an answer for it. Neither science or philosophy can explain the injustice. He questions, *Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*

Of course, the super-spiritual just can’t accept that David’s faith could falter—the man after God’s own heart. Then what of the Son of David on the cross, in His cry of dereliction? *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from...the words of my groaning* (Psalm 22:1). As Christ’s human nature collides head on with the furious and nuclear wrath of an all-powerful God, He recoils with horror and anguish. According to His finite human nature, He cannot see through the darkness of utter God-forsakenness. On the cross, all the evidence in the world seemingly testifies against God, against His existence. If Christ could see beyond His God-forsakenness then one must question His humanity, whether fully human. As fully human, He despairs with the despairing. He stands at the abyss of nothingness and peers into it, for me.

Christ’s cry of dereliction is similar to David’s complaint. *Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?* Important to notice, his complaint is not a proclamation of his New Atheism. His complaint is a prayer. He doesn’t rail *against* God. He cries out *to* God. He doesn’t rage *about* God. He prays *to* Him; to His personal God. We know so from the life of David. But also exegetically. Notice how he refers to God. *Why, O LORD*. Notice the capital letters. All caps used to indicate God’s covenantal name, Yahweh. Not Elohim, Adonai. Yahweh, God’s covenantal name reflecting personal relationship. His personal God. So David—while questioning God’s remoteness, refuses to let go of God. He refuses to deny Him. The question assumes that God can hear his prayer. His question about God’s remoteness is an assurance of His nearness. The complaint about God’s hiddenness is a confession of His There-ness, His reality. The God who remains hidden from the spiritually blind is the God Who Is There for His people. He remains hidden from those who deny Him and refuse to seek Him. But He is the God Who is There for those who seek Him and refuse to deny Him. David believes *Nevertheless*. It is his *Nevertheless* faith that pushes him through the darkness knowing that God is waiting on the other side. His faith breaks through the darkness. His defiant faith overcomes the false appearance of reality which seemingly contradicts the reality of God.

Petition for Justice

So he asks God to act. *Verse 12, Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted. Arise* indicates a sense of urgency. Now. Act immediately God. Specifically, lift up your hand. A figure of God's strength. His mighty right hand. And do what with his hand? *Verse 15, Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none.* Ultimately "God will break the power of the wicked and so demonstrate that He sees evil and holds the wicked accountable" (Gaebelein, 129). When? *till you find none.* No more wickedness. It is not merely that law and order is restored to the cities. So that one doesn't see oppression and anarchy on the streets. But God does not see any wickedness. *till you find none.* None. How is it that God can find none? No wickedness. Because Antifa is encoded on the dark web? No. That God cannot find none indicates that it no longer exists. Vanished. A clear expression of an expectation of the New Earth under the new heavens where they shall be nor more tear, *and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.* No more injustice and oppression, *for the former things have passed away* (Rev. 21:4). David's heart is strengthened at the thought of it. He loses himself in this vision of it. God's kingdom on earth, realized, consummated. He basks in the expectation of it. For God will *do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more* (18). God will do justice. Absolute and holy justice ultimately will be executed at the return of Christ. *From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

If we don't understand justice then we don't fundamentally understand the gospel. God's justice results in justification. What is justification? Very important term which Paul uses. *The just shall live by faith.* "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone" (SC 33). Justification is "just-as-if I had never sinned." How can God view me as if I had never sinned? God is just. He must punish sin. Justice must be executed. How can I be justified in God's sight? Because the justice which I deserved for my sin, my pride, my ego, my outrage, my lust, my lying, my racism was executed on the cross. Justice is what allows for justification.

Justice was executed in the greatest act of injustice in human history. An innocent man took my guilt which begins in an act of police brutality. The temple police, the local cops. The Temple Guards not Roman soldiers arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. They are sent with Judas by the *Jews*, the Pharisees, not Romans. The Temple Police arrest Jesus. You know what they are like. They love the LORD. They are good men, brave and self-less who give their lives "to serve and protect." But as always and everywhere within police forces, there are a few bad apples in the bunch whom Judas recruits in his plot to betray Jesus. Judas knows the bad cops. So these bad cops come to arrest Jesus—not in broad daylight but at night, under the cover of darkness. They read him no rights, bind Him, handcuff him. They lead him to a sham trial at the house of Caiaphas the High Priest.

The question of the trial is "Whose lives matters?" That of Christ or do "all lives matter?" *Caiaphas that had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man die for the people* (Jn. 18:14). Caiaphas foresees trouble brewing with Rome. One man should die for the nation to ensure public peace. So the judges must decide whose lives matter? That of Christ or do "all lives matter?" But in the trial His answers don't fit their political narrative. So the word police who censure free speech strike Him. Jesus counterquestions, *If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong. But if what I said is right, why do you strike me?* (Jn. 18:23). For which they

strike him again, *Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?* (Matt 26:68). Finally the High Priest sends Him away with bad cops and a false police record to the Roman governor so that Pilate might execute him as a common criminal. Christ is profiled by the authorities, arrested illegally, beaten by bad cops, then crucified by bad soldiers deployed oppressively as police.

Why? *It was to show [God's] righteousness at the present time, so that he might be **just** and the **justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus* (Rom. 3:26). God is just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. That is the message to America. Believe in Jesus that you might be justified by the justice of the greatest injustice of history. Amen.