

An Introduction to Imprecatory Psalms

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Well, our study this evening brings us to Psalm 69 in the Old Testament book of the Psalms and I would invite you to turn there with me. Psalm 69 is a fairly lengthy Psalm and it presents us with content that is somewhat difficult to deal with and we want to approach it carefully. So what I'm planning for this week and maybe next week and possibly two more, is to do some preliminary messages before we consider Psalm 69 as a whole. I want to look at some specific aspects that this Psalm raises because of the profound questions that it brings to our mind.

In Psalm 69, as is often the case, David is dealing with enemies. If you look at verses 1 through 4 with me, just to kind of start things here, he says,

1 Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life. 2 I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. 3 I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; My eyes fail while I wait for my God.

Then he introduces part of the problem that he's facing. He's facing enemies in verse 4. He says,

4 Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; Those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; What I did not steal, I then have to restore.

So there is a framing reference to enemies early in this Psalm that helps condition as to his situation as he is writing this prayer to his God.

Now, skipping over much of the Psalm for now, remembering that we are going to address the Psalm in full down the road, in part what he does in this Psalm is he asks God to bring severe judgment on his enemies. Look at verses 22 through 28. He says,

22 May their table before them become a snare; And when they are in peace, may it become a trap. 23 May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, And make their loins shake continually. 24 Pour out Your indignation on them, And may Your burning anger overtake them. 25 May their camp be desolate; May none dwell in their tents. 26 For they have

persecuted him whom You Yourself have smitten, And they tell of the pain of those whom You have wounded. 27 Add iniquity to their iniquity, And may they not come into Your righteousness. 28 May they be blotted out of the book of life And may they not be recorded with the righteous.

These are pretty severe words, aren't they? And at first blush, for those of us that are steeped in the New Testament and used to thinking in New Testament categories and New Testament texts, this is a hard passage and a hard type of prayer to reconcile with the New Testament call to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us, not to pray against them.

Look over at Matthew 5 just to kind of frame the issue here. Matthew 5:43 through 45, Jesus says,

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Well, that doesn't sound much like what David was doing in Psalm 69, does it? And the truth of the matter is as you read the Psalms with this matter of these prayers against enemies raised to you, you start to see that this is quite the problem because the Psalms frequently speak in such language. The psalmist is frequently praying against his enemies.

Let me just show you three other examples to kind of frame the issue. Go back to Psalm 5, and I deleted many texts from my notes simply for the sake of time at this point. Psalm 5:10 says,

10 Hold them guilty, O God; By their own devices let them fall! In the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out, For they are rebellious against You.

One of the more famous Psalms in this genre is Psalm 109, if you would turn there with me. Psalm 109, and all we're doing right now at this moment is just introducing the problem. We are just framing the issues so that we could see what we need to deal with to come to grips with the biblical text. Psalm 109:6, speaking of accusers against him, David says,

6 Appoint a wicked man over him, And let an accuser stand at his right hand. 7 When he is judged, let him come forth guilty, And let his prayer become sin. 8 Let his days be few; Let another take his office. 9 Let his children be fatherless And his wife a widow. 10 Let his children wander about and beg; And let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes. 11 Let the creditor seize all that he has, And let strangers plunder the

product of his labor. 12 Let there be none to extend lovingkindness to him,
Nor any to be gracious to his fatherless children. 13 Let his posterity be
cut off; In a following generation let their name be blotted out.

This is pretty severe, isn't it? The most severe of all of them is the well-known passage in Psalm 137, if you would turn there. Again, we're just illustrating with texts the nature of the problem. Psalm 137, a Psalm written during the course of the Babylonian captivity in the Old Testament, says in verse 7,

7 Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, "Raze it, raze it To its very foundation." 8 O daughter of
Babylon, you devastated one, How blessed will be the one who repays you
With the recompense with which you have repaid us. 9 How blessed will
be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones Against the rock.

Now, you read that for the first time, that does not sound very kind toward the enemies. These texts and others like them bring us to a genre of the Psalms known as the imprecatory Psalms and tonight's message is simply titled "An Introduction to Imprecatory Psalms." An imprecation is a prayer which invokes a curse from God upon an enemy. These Psalms are seeking the judgment of God on someone else and they are asking God to overthrow the wicked, and as we see, as we compare these Psalms superficially, superficially I say, with the New Testament passages like the one I read from Matthew 5, they raise difficult ethical questions for us. One 19th-century writer said this and I quote, "He said it is undeniable that these expressions in the Psalms have been a source of grief and perplexity to the Christian while they have furnished occasion for scoffing to the skeptical." What he's saying is tenderhearted believers look at this and compare Scripture with Scripture and are not sure what to do with it, not sure what to do with the seeming vindictive nature of these Psalms. And along with that on the other side of the spectrum, you have those who do not believe the Bible, who do not believe in Christ, and they use these things to scoff at Scripture and to scoff at those who would uphold a high view of God and say, "Is this the ethic that you're trying to teach, that we are trying to bring judgment on your enemies?" And that's the kind of skeptical nature that he is referring to.

One of those skeptics is C. S. Lewis, a man whose influence is far greater than his reliability. He says about these Psalms and goes on for pages and pages about it in his book "Reflections on the Psalms," he says that these Psalms "are full of malice, pettiness, vulgarity, and vindictive hatred." He goes on to say that "ferocious, self pitying, barbaric men wrote these devilish cursings. The psalmist's reaction to injury, though profoundly natural, is profoundly wrong." That's no less a man than C. S. Lewis, again I say, whose influence is greater than his reliability.

Well, is that the right way for us to think about these Psalms? Should we look at them and say that they were written by a ferocious, barbaric man who was profoundly wrong in what he said? Do these Psalms and others like them violate biblical ethics and godliness and are they merely an example of a man whose hatred has taken over his heart? Well,

the truth of the matter is, beloved, that this is not an easy topic. This is somewhat elusive and it requires us to think with close consideration lest we go astray, and this is a topic, I would say, that brings us back to an entire way of thinking, an entire way to approach thought, and the way that you think about issues. The problem that the critics run into is that they too quickly want to solve this apparent tension and the easy way to solve the tension is to dismiss the Old Testament writer and elevate so-called New Testament principles in their place. But it's not that simple and what we need to do is we need to step back and remember general principles that can never be violated and let those general principles inform the way that we think about a difficult issue. You don't start immediately with a difficult, the most difficult issue that you can find and try to sort it out on its own terms, you have to think and step back and say what are the broader general principles that inform my thinking about everything, that inform my approach about all of Scripture, and then you let those general principles gradually bring you into a conclusion that is satisfactory, and that's what we're going to start to do this evening.

Basically what I have for you this evening are three basic points and we're just going to get started tonight. I just want to get started with this tonight and then expand on it more next week but, beloved, here's the thing that we should start with, I guess, is to remember point 1: that the Psalms are God's word. The Psalms are God's word. Everything in the 66 books of the Bible comes from God and that has a serious implication for us as students of the Bible. That means that we should not quickly dismiss it; we should not quickly criticize it; we should not rush to condemn anything that we see stated and affirmed in Scripture.

Remember Romans 15:4, if you want to turn there, you can. Romans 15:4, the Apostle Paul says that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Whatever was written in former times in the Scripture was written to profit us, to instruct us, to give us direction, and so we start with the premise that these Psalms are somehow profitable, somehow are useful, somehow are good for us, even if – watch this, watch this – even if it is not immediately apparent to us how that could be the case. So we start with that premise, that somehow these Scriptures are good for us, that they instruct us well, because all of Scripture is God's word.

You remember 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." So we have the New Testament looking back and stating with a blanket affirmation of the Old Testament, there is profitable instruction to be found there. And one of the reasons that this is so important to us, this point about the Psalms being God's word, is that it causes us to slow down. It causes us to humble our hearts. It causes us to put a muzzle on our tongue which is sometimes so quick to speak foolishly, and we say, "But wait a second, I may not immediately see the profit here, I may not immediately know the resolution to the problem here, but I know from a broader consideration of Scripture that I am supposed to come to Scripture with an attitude of deference. I am to come as a disciple. I am to come as one who is here to learn." And you and I should approach Scripture, should approach

the Psalms, should approach the prophets who often spoke in these ways, with this fundamental principle in our minds: we are not morally superior to the biblical writers who were writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Scripture sits in judgment of us, we do not sit in judgment of Scripture, and that changes the way that you think about these imprecatory Psalms. Rather than coming from a self-appointed moral throne and saying, "I find this to be objectionable and not profitable for human consideration. I consider these writers as C. S. Lewis said to be devilish." No, we step down from that position of pride and arrogance and come as one who needs to sit at the foot of Scripture and say, "What is it that this would teach me? What is it that I would learn from here?"

When I was teaching Greek back in that other place that I came from, I often told the students that when you come to a difficult text, when you come to difficult grammatical structures as you are studying the Greek New Testament, I would tell them, you need to adopt an attitude of patience and sit down, as it were, and I would literally sit down on the floor in the classroom, that always got their attention, but you need to sit down in front of the text and rather than thinking the text is the problem, rather than thinking that somehow Scripture is the cause of this difficulty here, it's to recognize that the cause of difficulty is always within yourself. It is from a lack of understanding, perhaps a sinful attitude, perhaps a lack of perspective, but Scripture is perfect. Scripture is high and lofty and exalted because it is the very word of God and, therefore, our first presupposition should be when we come to something that causes a difficulty in our mind like the imprecatory Psalms do, is to say, "Wait a second, the Psalms are God's word, the problem must somehow be with me because it couldn't possibly be with the Scriptures." And if you adopt that perspective, it will help you deal rightly with the imprecatory Psalms, in my opinion, and it will also more broadly, that attitude will shape you in a way that will make you a fitting disciple of your Lord Jesus. This is what his word is worthy of. This is the devotion and trust of which Christ is worthy of, never to raise our hand against Scripture, never to raise our voice against it, but to seek to learn from it and to seek what it would have to teach us. The Psalms are God's word and that frames the way that we think.

Now, secondly, for our second principle tonight we could say this: the Old Testament warns against a vengeful spirit. The Old Testament warns against a vengeful spirit. Now, as we said, the psalmists wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and all of Scripture, all of Scripture is inspired by God in that manner. The Spirit of God worked through the human writers in a way to produce a product that was entirely the word of God and expresses exactly what God wanted to express. Even though the Psalms were written 3,000 years ago from our time reference, we do not view them simply as a human product written by men from a barbaric age. We understand that Scripture bears the imprint of God; that these writers were recording exactly what God wanted said. That means that we take an attitude of deference to it, it also means something else. Because all of Scripture, all 66 books of the Bible are ultimately a reflection of the one mind of God, it means that there is going to be an internal consistency between every passage of Scripture. It may not always be apparent to us and, beloved, it may not always be easy. It may require a lot of work and difficult thought and difficult questions before these problems begin to unfold before us, but there should be this underlying understanding in

our mind that there is an internal consistency with Scripture. They are not in competition or in contradiction to one another. Again, that thought is far bigger for your philosophy of life, your philosophy of Scripture, the way in which you walk with God. It's much bigger than just the imprecatory Psalms, it reflects the attitude that says not only is this true, it is internally consistent in one manner or another, and if I don't see that immediately, the problem is not with the Bible, the problem is with me. There is some lack in me that's not seeing it.

So how does that help us here? Well, the accusation against the Psalms, these imprecatory Psalms, is that they are vengeful and vindictive, blah blah blah, but when we look at other texts in the Old Testament, we see that there is an atmosphere that pervades the Old Testament that should inform the way that we consider these imprecatory Psalms.

Go back to the book of Leviticus, if you will, Leviticus 19. Leviticus 19, and what we're doing this evening in large part is just kind of like just getting all of the tools out and laying them out so that you are ready to do the work later. It's not that we're going to build the product all in one evening, we're just getting the tools out and getting them ready so that we can think rightly.

So Leviticus 19:17 says this, and this is in the foundational book of Moses, the book of Moses being the first five books of the Bible. In Leviticus 19:17, the law of Moses, which David would have been steeped in as the King of Israel, he knew what this text said. He says in verse 17,

17 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.'

That was written prior to David by some 400 years. Go to the Proverbs in Proverbs 24 for something written after the time of David. Proverbs 24:17 and 18 says,

17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; 18 Or the LORD will see it and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him.

Here's the thing that I want you to see as we look at those passages, beloved, is that before and after the time of David, functioning like bookends, the Old Testament warned God's people against vengeance and a bitter spirit.

Now, if all of Scripture is God's word, and it is, then it cannot contradict itself, and somehow, therefore, these imprecatory Psalms are informed by these warnings against a vengeful spirit, somehow these imprecatory Psalms fit with the overall spirit of the Old Testament. You could think about it as the colors of the rainbow. There are seven colors on a rainbow, not every passage of Scripture has to be painted with the same shade of

color, does it? Wouldn't that make for a boring rainbow if it was all just one color? Well, the Scriptures can speak in different colors to different situations and still be consistent with the overall one greater whole, just as seven colors don't contradict each other in the rainbow. Beloved, as we're thinking about these things, we must realize that these imprecatory Psalms are God's eternal word and even within their own context in the Old Testament, there are warnings against vengeance, there are warnings against taking out your own judgment, and that means that we look at this and we say here are these difficult imprecatory Psalms, here's what the Old Testament says about these, somehow these are in balance with one another, they are not in contradiction with one another, so that we see even in the Old Testament a caution against a vengeful spirit, and that informs the way that we look at it.

So here's the framework of thought that we're putting together as we consider this: all of Scripture is God's word. God is holy. God is true. He could never speak wrongly. There is going to be an internal consistency to his word. Yes, we understand that these imprecatory Psalms at first glance, at a superficial reading, seem to be in conflict with a biblical ethic, but that couldn't be the case. As soon as we think that way, we correct ourselves and say, "No, that couldn't be the case. I know that from the Old Testament that there are conditions and qualifications that should inform the way I think about these things." So the Old Testament warns against a sinful vengeance and there's another side to it that the critics don't always acknowledge which brings us to point 3: the New Testament has its own imprecations. The New Testament has its own imprecations.

Now, the idea that informs some of the criticism of these imprecatory Psalms is that some people will say, "Well, the Old Testament had a different ethic. The Old Testament engages in vengeance and is marked by a thirsty bloodshed and war and all of that. So on the one hand you have the Old Testament engaging in vengeance but the New Testament calls us to forgiveness and calls us to love, and so these two things, these two books, the Old and new Testaments, are just presenting different ethics to us." And they use that as though that would explain away the problem. Well, we've already seen that that doesn't hold water with the Old Testament because there are these calls to moderation and love and against grudges in the Old Testament, but then when you read the New Testament, you realize that that argument won't get you very far at all if you actually read all of it and not simply focus on two or three famous passages from the Lord that are addressing different concepts anyway.

Look over at Matthew 23, for example. Matthew 23. I originally thought that I might read this entire passage of Matthew 23, but it's just a little bit too long for our purposes tonight, but in Matthew 23, look at verse 13 and how Jesus addresses the Pharisees, and keep in mind this idea that, "Oh, the New Testament is only about love and forgiveness." Well, that's kind of hard to square with everything that you find in what Jesus says in verse 13 of Matthew 23 where he says,

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 Woe to you, scribes

and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation. 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. 16 Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' 17 You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?"

And he goes on repeating woe after woe after woe, eight times in this chapter as I recall. Verse 29 he says,

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?"

Now, this is Jesus talking. One writer said this about Matthew 23 and Jesus' words and condemnations of the Pharisees, and I quote, he says, "There is no hint of sympathy, no proposal of clemency, no trace of kindness, no effort on Jesus' part to be nice to the Pharisees. Indeed, with these words, Jesus formally and resoundingly pronounced their doom. By today's standards, Jesus' words about the Pharisees and his treatment of them are breathtakingly severe."

You remember, don't you, that in Galatians 1, the Apostle Paul pronounced curses on false teachers? Galatians 1, turn there with me. Galatians 1:8 says,

8 ... even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

In the book of Revelation, God vindicates the martyrs' cry for vengeance. Look at Revelation 6, beginning in verse 9. Revelation 6:9 says,

9 When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Crying out for vengeance. Crying out for justice. "God, look what they have done to your people! How long will you let this justice go unsatisfied?" I should say, "How long will you let this injustice go unsatisfied, unaddressed?"

Then if you turn to chapter 19 of Revelation, you find that God answers, and in Revelation 19:1, his answer becomes a ground for great praise.

1 After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; 2 because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her." 3 And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever." 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

You see, what do these passages show us from Matthew, from Galatians, from Revelation, as we think about the imprecatory Psalms, what does it show us? It shows us this: you cannot pit the New Testament against these imprecatory Psalms because the New Testament contains its own vengeance and curses as well.

So let's step back and just kind of take this all in as we are, again, just introducing things this evening. All of the Bible is God's word and we expect an internal consistency to what we read in it. When it comes to these imprecatory Psalms, we say, "Ah, this is hard. This is difficult. I'm not quite sure what to do with this so let me remember a couple of early things on. First of all, I find warnings against excessive vengeance in the Old Testament itself, and so I should understand Old Testament passages with a sympathetic ear in light of that. And I also realize I can't just say the New Testament out and out condemns judgments and prayers for judgment against God's enemies because I see Jesus declaring judgment, I see Paul declaring judgment, I see Revelation carrying out judgment. So I may not know just yet," speaking as a student of Scripture. I know where I'm going with this myself, even though we are not going to get all the way to the station tonight. "I may not know myself how to put all of these things together, but there is something going on here that means that I need to be careful about how I speak. I need to be careful about speaking against God's word or being critical of the psalmists, as if they were writing sinful things that I should not be paying attention to."

Here is a preview of coming attractions for where we are going to go in the next week or two. Beloved, this is important. The imprecatory Psalms remind us of something very very critical, too easily forgotten in our flabby age: God is not just a God of grace and forgiveness, God is a holy God of justice. God is a God, Psalm 7 says, God is a righteous judge who has indignation every day. God, it says in Exodus 15, just immediately after he buried the Egyptian army in the sea, God is a warrior. God is a warrior. God is a judge. God is holy. God does not bear lightly with sinners. But us, meaning us in our day and age, not in this room, what about our day and age? Let's be honest: truth and holiness are not a priority for our refined age, are they? Ours is an age of false tolerance and moral

equivalence. At best, our age, the spirit of our age sees good and evil simply as varying shades of gray; simply seeing it as different shades on a continuum with no sharp distinction between them.

You see, beloved, there is a problem. There is a real problem with the imprecatory Psalms, but it is not where the critics of Scripture think they are. You see, the problem is not that the imprecatory Psalms are in the Bible. That's not the problem. That couldn't be the problem. That's impossible. That's foolish to think that way. It is ungodly to think that way. No, the problem is not that the imprecatory Psalms are in the Bible with their cries for justice and their cries that God would deal with the ungodly. That's not the problem. The problem is that there is not more of the imprecatory Psalms in us. I said that. I believe that to be absolutely true. The problem is not that the imprecatory Psalms are in the Bible, the problem is that there is not more of the imprecatory Psalms in us.

What do I mean by that? Our world, we can be more particular, the evangelical church in general, needs more holy zeal. It needs more righteous indignation. It needs that more than anything right now. Haven't we had enough of the saccharine coated messages of the past 50 years that have conditioned people to simply think that God only loves them and only has a good plan for the lives? Haven't we had enough of the sugarcoated ministry that is promised to so-called seekers that God simply wants to bless them and help them along in their earthly lives? Haven't we had enough of the men with puffy hair promising us health and wealth and prosperity and performing phony miracles in order to captivate a people and empty the wallets of destitute widows desperate for help? Haven't we had enough of that? Haven't we had enough of the dripping blood on the hands of abortionists and on our culture killing millions of babies year after year after year simply for the sake of personal convenience? Haven't we had enough of the distortion of marriage wrought upon us by people who hate God and want nothing to do with him? Haven't we had enough of these things and a thousand others like them, all of which is an offense against God? Haven't we had enough of the attacks on Scripture? Haven't we had enough of the denials of Christ? Haven't we had enough of the false religions perverting the Gospel of grace with their man-made traditions? Haven't we had enough of false teachers, blind guides leading the blind into a pit? Haven't we had enough of the corruption in Catholic leadership in the sexual abuse scandals that they have perpetrated on decades of those who trusted them? Where is the holy zeal that would rise up and protest before the throne of God, "God, this is not right! God, this is a perversion of everything you've declared to be holy and true! God, this is a violation of your truth! God, this is a violation of your holiness!" Haven't we had enough?

You see, our problem isn't that there is judgment spoken in the Bible, our problem in our age, our problem in the church at large, is that there is just not the zeal and the righteous indignation against these things which God's word clearly declares and a thousand others like them, to be an offense to his good and holy name. That's the problem. That's the problem. The problem is that C. S. Lewis and others like him are of such flabby disposition, spiritually speaking, that they can't recognize black and white so clearly to realize that we need to be on the side of white and against the side of black. I'm using those as colors, not as races. You see, beloved, if we have a sense for the zeal and the

indignation, the concern for the glory of God, the zeal for his glory, for his righteousness, for his truth, if we had something of that zeal within us, we would understand why the psalmist speaks at such extremes when his glory is so violated. Rather than sitting in judgment of God's word, and rather than sitting as armchair quarterbacks critiquing what God's men wrote thousands of years ago and which will stand long after our lives are gone, if we knew something of holy zeal and righteous indignation, we would realize that perhaps, no perhaps to it, we would realize that the fear of God would be the beginning of wisdom. To revere his holiness, to learn to hate what he hates, would provoke within our hearts some kind of response against it rather than settling into a lukewarm compromise with all that evil that is around us. The fear of God would be the beginning of wisdom. The zeal of the psalmist would become our own zeal and we would more gladly and more fearlessly align ourselves with the holy purposes of God. That's what I mean when I say the problem is that there is not enough of the imprecatory Psalms in us.

Now, all of that doesn't solve the dilemma, it doesn't solve every question that even what we've raised here tonight would be. All that we've done tonight, all we wanted to accomplish I trust we have accomplished. Tonight what we have seen from Scripture has cautioned us to approach these Psalms with a sense of humility, and as we approach them with humility, for us to be in a position then to sit and say, "Speak, Lord. Teach me. Help me to understand what it is that you would have me take from these passages of Scripture that are so contrary to the spirit of the age in which I live." Even when you say it like that, shouldn't it be obvious to us in this room as Bible believing Christians, shouldn't it be obvious when we frame it that way? "Lord, these Psalms are contrary to the tolerant spirit of our age," simply saying that, shouldn't it click in our minds, "Aha, the problem is the tolerant spirit of our age."

These imprecatory Psalms will influence us, will have a sanctifying impact on us as we study them in future weeks. I invite you to come back next week as we resume our study of them in the days to come.

Let's pray together.

Father, we've only opened the door to peek inside to what you would have us learn from these imprecatory Psalms and from their place in the canon of Scripture. Father, we want to be aligned with you. We realize that we are all in danger of a wrongful vengeful spirit. We all get out of sorts with people who cross us and, Father, so often there is sin in our reaction to those situations. But these Psalms are pointing us to something different, they are appointing us to something transcendent as they point us to the glory of God, the righteousness of God, the holiness of God, God as a warrior, God as a vindicator of right. And Father, that's what we need to see. Father, we would want always to be gracious, loving, forgiving people, yes, but, Father, we would not lose sight of what your word teaches us about your own zeal for righteousness and the fact that our desire, our first priority, to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. So Father, as we look at these things in the days to come, would you give us grace to understand? Father, would you give us a heart for holiness not just for grace and forgiveness? And Father, may you strengthen us that we would stand with you and against the wicked spirit of our age, not

to be sucked into a mindset and assume that that's the way that we should interpret and understand Scripture, but rather to come first to Scripture with a humble, teachable heart and after our eyes have looked down to your word, then and only then to look out on the world around us and to understand better what we see. Help us, we pray, to that end, and we thank you for this time together. In Jesus' name. Amen.