

“Vengeance is Mine”

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Series: *Psalms*

Bible Text: Psalm 10

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Good morning, if you've got a Bible, you can open with me to Psalm 10. We're taking a break from the book of Romans and working our way through just a selection of Psalms this summer. I think that's something that CPC has done in the past. I feel like I need, after the first service, just to warn you guys that if you're looking for a happy, clappy, uplifting sermon, this is not it. That's not really my fault. That's just this Psalm. This Psalm is one that's going to deal with sort of the dark side of life, which is very real. This is a Psalm written by David. It's a Psalm of lament. It's a cry for God to act, for him to do justice upon evil. So as we come to this, let's remember that we live in a world that is dark. And if you let it, though it will be sad and hard to focus on this, if we really engage with the text, you will come out. It will bear fruit of joy in your life, I believe. Let's give our attention now to God's word.

Psalm 10. Why, oh Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In arrogance, the wicked hotly pursue the poor. Let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised. For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord. In the pride of his face, the wicked does not seek him. All his thoughts are, there is no God. His ways prosper at all times. Your judgments are on high, out of his sight. As for all his foes, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, I shall not be moved. Throughout all generations, I shall not meet adversity. His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression. Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity. He sits in ambush in the villages. In hiding places, he murders the innocent. His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless. He lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket. He lurks that he may seize the poor. He seizes the poor when he draws him into his net. The helpless are crushed. Sink down and fall by his might. He says in his heart, God has forgotten. He has hid in his face. He will never see it. Arise, oh Lord. Oh God, lift up your hand. Forget not the afflicted. Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, you will not call to account? But you do see. For you note mischief and vexation that you may take it into your hands. To you, the helpless commits himself. You have been the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer. Call his wickedness to account till you find none. The Lord is king forever and ever. The nations perish from his land. Oh Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted. You will strengthen their heart. You will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed. So that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

Lord, I ask that you would help me to preach about your justice. I pray that you'd give us all ears and hearts that are receptive and ready to hear from you, Lord. And I pray that we would be a church, we would be a people who are quick to cry out to you for justice. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

You're probably familiar with the film *The Count of Monte Cristo*. It's based on an old, old book written in 19th century France, and it's based in that same period. The main character, Edmund Dantes, he is an honest sailor man. His life is sort of going well. He's engaged to be married to the love of his life, Mercedes. He's just gotten promoted as a sailor. Things are going well, but then he is betrayed and he is framed for treason. He's framed by three people. First, his best friend, or who he thought was his best friend, frames him because he's in love with his fiancé. And then one of his fellow sailors, Danglers, frames him because he's envious of his promotion. And then Villefort, the local prosecutor, needs to cover up his family secret, and so he joins in the plot. And the scene ends with Villefort, the prosecutor, saying to Edmund Dantes, I'm sorry, son, you're the only one who knows the truth, and I cannot let that truth be known. So he burns the evidence and sends Dantes to a prison to die. Meanwhile, Dantes has to watch as, or we have to watch as all of these people prosper. His friend takes what was his fiancé and marries her. His fellow sailor takes his job and continues to climb the ladder. And then the prosecutor, Villefort, gains political power. And so on the wall of his prison cell, he scribbles the words, God will give me justice.

We live in a world, like Edmund Dantes, we live in a world where the wicked prosper. Where the bad guy gets away with it. Usually it's not in such a dramatic fashion as we see in this movie, but you, if you have lived long enough, you have been the victim at some point of wickedness. The coworker who takes credit for your work and gets promoted. The leader whose dark secret that only you know continues to gain popularity and power. The class bully, who despite his cruelty to you is beloved by his teachers, by his coaches, and his classmates. When we experience this injustice, we're often left feeling like David is in this Psalm, where we feel alone. The temptation is to be angry, bitter. We feel stuck. So what do we do?

What do we do in this world where the wicked often prosper?

As we look at our text today, we can follow David's example because he lives in that same world. And we'll see that because we have a God who will act, we can and we must cry out to him for justice. Two points today. First, we want to cry out to the Lord with our complaint. And then we want to cry out to the Lord for justice.

Let's start by looking at verses 2 through 11. Like I said, this is a dark Psalm, it's a dark passage, and it starts by giving us a God's eye view of a wicked person. Sort of from the inside out, what they think, what they feel, where their eyes go. Make no mistake that this description we're

about to read, it's not theoretical. This is real. These are real people, who are committing real evil. So let's look at this. David's going to describe sort of the anatomy of a wicked man.

First his heart, look at there at verses 2 and 3, says, *in arrogance, the wicked hotly pursue the poor. He boasts in the desires of his soul.*

You maybe, if you've experienced evil or injustice, sometimes you'll end up asking the question, why are they doing this to me? Why? We have our answer here. It's just their own pride. That's the only cause. It's nothing that you've done. It is their pride. The only law they submit to is the law of their own heart. One commentator says it this way, the ungodly permit themselves to do anything. They do not distinguish between what is lawful and unlawful because their own lust is their law. That's their heart. Their thoughts. This psalm, it's more valuable than any psychological study. It gives us a God's eye view into the mind of someone who's doing evil.

Look at what they think. First in verse 4, it says, the evil person says, *there is no God*. In verse 11, *God has forgotten, and he will not call to account*. Their basic way of reasoning, their way of thinking is that there will never be accountability for their actions. God doesn't see, and if he does see, he forgets. He turns a blind eye. He's not going to do anything about it. They believe wholeheartedly that there will never be justice.

Their tongue, he goes on to tell us about their tongue, what comes out of their mouth in verse 7, *it's filled with cursing, deceit, malice, mischief, and iniquity*. When I read that, I kind of think, oh, I should be able to identify that. I should know if I hear a wicked person talk, but often deceit, the deceit that's talked about here, it's not easily detectable. Sometimes it is, but often it's not. That's the very nature of a deceitful person is its purpose is to make you believe something that's not true. Another psalm, Psalm 55 captures this well. It says, *his speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart*. You see, God gave us language and words to communicate the truth, but the wicked, they don't use it for that. They use it as a weapon to get what they want, to manipulate. David calls it out in this passage.

He goes on in verse 8 to tell us about their eyes, where their eyes look. *His eyes stealthily watch for the helpless*. This is spooky. It's kind of scary to even look at. The idea here is that their eyes are watching you, but they don't want you to know that they're watching you. And their eyes are looking for something specific. They're looking for someone who is weak, someone who is helpless. They're looking out of the corner of their eye or from behind their sunglasses. They're watching, but you won't know it.

Their actions. Look at the verbs used in 8 through 10 to describe the actions of the wicked. *Hiding, lurking, watching, setting traps*. They want you to feel safe, to let your guard down. This is all done in the cover of darkness and secrecy. They're waiting. They're opportunists waiting for just the right moment to strike.

And then finally, David tells us about their victims. Notice that their victims are carefully chosen. This Psalm uses a number of words to describe the victims of the wicked. It uses the word *poor*,

afflicted, helpless, innocent, fatherless, the oppressed, the unfortunate. Notice that they will never go after someone who is strong, who is in a position of power, who can defend themselves. They're not going after the strong man. They're going after the person who is relationally vulnerable, financially vulnerable, has no power or influence. To say it another way, they attack those who they know cannot fight back.

Verse 9 actually gives us a helpful metaphor. And any time the Bible uses a metaphor, it is well worth its weight in gold to just dwell on it. So we'll dwell on this one for a second. It describes a wicked person as a lion hunting prey. Now if you've seen a nature documentary, you are familiar with the way this works. The lions, they're quietly prowling around, right? They're lurking behind a thicket in the bushes. The wildebeest, meanwhile, are just sort of grazing, minding their own business. And the lions are looking for the weak, for the wounded, for the newborn. The animals that they know won't put up much of a fight. And once they identify that animal, they're looking to isolate them. And when the right moment comes, they pounce and they take them down.

This is the anatomy of a wicked person.

What should you expect to feel?

How should you respond?

What should you expect your heart to do when you experience what David experiences in this psalm?

We'll look at how David responds. He feels abandoned by God. Look at verse 1. *Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?* As he sees the bad guy is prospering, he feels as though God has abandoned him. God is inactive. He's far away. He's not going to do anything. The statement here, it's David's question is not meant to express a theological reality, but a personal feeling that David is experiencing in the midst of evil. David of course knows that God is right there with him, otherwise he wouldn't bother praying to him. He wouldn't bother crying out if he didn't believe that God would hear him. But this is the effect that evil and injustice has on us. It makes us feel abandoned.

Those of you who have suffered violence and abuse, you've probably felt exactly how David feels when he penned this psalm. And the reason for this is that evil, when it comes, it comes with an attachment. It's like an email with an attachment that's got a malware virus. You get emails all the time from all kinds of phishing scams and hackers that are trying to get your information, trying to get into your computer. What are they? You get an email and it wants you to click a link or something and then that's going to download malware onto your computer and it's going to cause all kinds of problems. Evil is like that. When something bad, when someone does something bad to you, along with it is this attachment that says this lie that comes along with that, this malware that infects the way that you think and convinces you God has abandoned you. It messes up our operating system and we, it's hard. It can be hard to not believe that lie

that comes with it. Where are you, God, why? And so David cries out, overwhelmed by those feelings, why? Why do you stand far off?

But God does hear that that hidden message in the evil that God is far off, that he is not listening, that he will not bring justice, it's a lie. There's two ways that we as humans tend to respond when we see evil in this world. There's probably more than two, but I'll just talk about these two. Two wrong responses.

The first is to minimize evil. I see this all the time, you know, they mean well or they just, they just had a, they probably just had a bad circumstances. I see this most commonly when there is sort of a national tragedy, like a school shooting or something like that. The media wants to look for anywhere to point the blame but the shooter. Instead, this Psalm shows us that we are called to blame the one who is doing the evil. To look at squarely in the face and say, what that person did was evil and let justice be done upon them. Calls us not to minimize evil but to look it in the face and to bring it to God, God, bring justice.

The other way that we respond when we're, when we're infected with this, this malware virus that tells us God will not bring justice is, is we try to get revenge. If God's not going to do justice, then I've got to take it into my own hands. And then of course, forgiveness becomes impossible. We become bitter, angry people. Instead we must trust that vengeance is the Lord's. And so this Psalm, it's calling us to cry out to God with the truth, with our complaint. Just as David does here. How long?

How long will liars get promoted?

How long will you let bad leaders gain power and popularity?

How long will the biggest bully in the school be the most beloved, the most popular?

As we see injustice as Christians, we're called to cry out to God and not to listen to that, that attachment, that malware attachment that comes with it. That brings us to point two, because we have a God who will act,

we must cry out to him for justice.

Look there with me at verses 12 through 18. David, this is sort of the turning point in the Psalm, and David turns his attention from the wicked, now he looks at God. You see the wicked there in verse 13, the wicked says in his heart, you will not call to account, but you do see. Now he addresses God, but God you do see, for you note mischief and vexation that you may take it into your hands. You see the wicked has staked his entire life on this one thought, and that is that God is not going to bring justice. Everything that he does flows out of that. I can do whatever I want because there will never be accountability. The Bible tells us that what the wicked sees as God's neglect is actually his patience. This is what's classically been called the problem of evil. If

God is good and he's powerful, why is there evil in the world? The New Testament in 2 Peter 3 actually gives us an answer. It says this,

do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

What the wicked says is God's inactivity, his neglect, the Bible tells us is actually his patience. He's waiting patiently, giving us, giving everyone an opportunity to repent, to turn to him before it's too late. The wicked takes that patience and he twists it and he uses it and weaponizes it.

Here we have the turning point in the Psalm where David takes his eyes off the wicked and he sets his eyes on God who is the judge, who is the king. In verse 14,

but you do see, for you note mischief and vexation that you may take it into your hands.

Here is this reality that David clings to that despite what his feelings say, despite what your feelings may say, the malware infected feelings, God is not absent. He does see. Not only does he see, but it says he's taking notes. He's collecting evidence. Tells us not only that he's watching, that he's taking notes, but actually tells us in our passage why. Why is he watching so closely? That he may take it into his hands, that he may take it, justice, into his hands. You see, God is not a passive observer, though it often feels that way. He is not a passive observer. He is looking on with a very specific purpose. He means to call the wicked to account, to do justice. To say that another way, God is collecting evidence for judgment day.

So David, despite what he feels, he ends the Psalm, do you see how he ends it? He ends it with confidence, affirming that God will do justice. His circumstances have not changed. But now he confidently says in verse 16, *the Lord is king forever*. You hear. You will strengthen the afflicted. You will do justice to the fatherless so that the wicked will strike terror no more. David was confident that God would do justice.

Christians, we have so much more reason to be confident than him. As we trace this theme of justice into the New Testament, we see that it reaches its culmination at the cross with Jesus. As my sins, as your sins were imputed to Christ, God is so committed to doing justice that he would even pour out his wrath on his own son. Because justice required it. The cross, you see, the cross is a seal not only of God's mercy but of his commitment to justice. There is no such thing as getting away with it in this universe. God is judge and he sees everything. No evil will go unpunished.

We love shows about justice. I think it's because we're made in God's image and he is a just God. If you're like me, you love to go back week after week to these same crime TV shows. CSI, NCIS, Blue Bloods, Law and Order. And week after week, we know it's going to happen, right? We know how it's going to play out. We watch the bad guy do something bad and you think, oh, no, they're

going to get away with it. Then they catch him. They're convicted. They're guilty. And we'll watch it. We watch it over and over again, right? Because we long for justice. Often in these police shows, the investigators will actually know, they'll actually know who the guilty person is, but they'll let them go. They'll let them go because they need to collect more evidence. And so they tap their phone. They monitor their vehicle and their Internet. And when the moment's right, the SWAT team rolls in and they catch them in the act guilty with all the evidence to close the case. Judgment day. Judgment day has come. There is a final cosmic judgment day that's coming. What will it be like? There's a lot of, I think, misconceptions about what that day will be like. The Bible has some answers for us.

First, it's not a generic judge. Jesus, our Lord, our Savior, our King, He will be the judge.

Second, it will be universal. There is no amount of money or power that can get you out of this judgment day. It doesn't matter how well connected you are. As the Apostles' Creed says, *he shall come to judge the living and the dead*. Not even death can get you out of this. It will be bodily. It will be bodily. The final judgment will not be merely a spiritual matter. Everyone living and dead will be raised to a new body and will stand before Jesus in their new bodies. It will be bodily. It will be public. To say that another way, we will all be there to witness it.

Romans 2 speaks to this. It says, on that day that God judges the secrets of men, there is nothing secret that will not be known. Every secret will be known on that day. And we will all either receive the penalty for our sins or else we will, or else it will be imputed to Christ and He will bear the penalty for us. It will be customized.

Judgment day will be customized.

Matthew 11:24 says, *truly I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town*. Do you see what he's saying? He's saying judgment day is going to be worse for some than it is for others. This is something that I think most Christians don't understand. It's not a one size fits all judgment day. It will be custom fit to every individual based on their specific sins and their opportunity to repent. We know this. Just as an earthly judge would never give the same penalty for a speeding ticket as for a first degree murder, so our perfect heavenly judge will dish out justice perfectly.

And finally, it will be swift.

Saint Peter says the day of the Lord will come like a thief. Say that another way. When it comes, it will be too late. Could be today, could be in a hundred years, but when it comes, the time for repentance will be over. It will be too late. God has promised to do this, and we have a certain seal in the cross. He is fiercely committed to justice, and not only justice on this last day, but he even brings little snapshots of judgment day into the world now. He uses the proper authorities to bring little convoys of justice ahead of the main army. We can be thankful for this. Justice doesn't all wait until the last day. It breaks into the world and exposes secret things. And for this reason, it is good if you know someone who's doing a bad thing, it is good to expose that. It is

right to bring it to the light. This is when evildoers are caught in their own nets. And this is exactly what David asked for in verse 12. He says, *arise, O Lord, lift up your hand*. Do you hear what he's saying? He's saying this has gone on long enough. Would you do something about it? Do something, Lord.

If you're here today and you're not a Christian, we're glad that you're here. I want to be very clear on this point and say that judgment day is real. Science cannot prove it, but the Lord has sent many messengers to declare that judgment is coming and like me, your hope on that day, your only hope will be Jesus. So please, turn away from living for yourself and throw yourself upon Jesus and trust your life, give your life to him.

Christian, in the face of injustice, cry out to God. Cry out to our God who will act. He will act either now or on the last day, but he will act. But why don't we cry out to God? Well, because it feels, doesn't it, it feels like he is far away. That infection, that malware virus that comes along with evil, it whispers in our ear, he's not going to do anything. You're all on your own. He's abandoned you. And when you've seen the bad guy get away with it over and over again, it is very easy to believe that lie. Like Steve said last week, the world is on video and God's voice is on audio.

This passage tells us, Christian, your God is not far away. He is listening. And he intends to do justice. He is fiercely committed to justice. There's a quote there on the front of your bulletin, I don't know if you saw it. It's by A.W. Pink. He has a way with words. He says this,

“the sinner is treading a path more slippery than ice. And unless he forsake it, in due time his foot shall slide. The bow of God's wrath is already bent. The arrow of his vengeance is even now fitted to the string. And nothing but his infinite forbearance stays its release.”

God means to do justice. And it's only his patience that keeps him from bringing it at this very moment.

Kids, perhaps you suffer under the wrath of a bully at school. I've been there. It's no fun. Makes it such that you dread going to school. You hate it. You can know this. This passage teaches us, God sees what they're doing. God sees what they're doing. It may feel like you're alone, but he will hold to account. You can cry out to him for justice. Do it. Cry out to him.

Christians, we have a God who listens, who acts. Let us cry out to him in the face of injustice. Think of the history of God's people.

Think of the Israelites who suffered under Pharaoh, and they cried out to him, and he heard them, and he rescued them.

Think of Jacob who cried out to God from the pit, and God heard him and rescued him.

Think of Job. Think of Esther and Mordecai. They cried out, and God answered them, and he can answer your cry for justice, too. If not in this life, he will certainly answer it in the next.

The evil we experience in this world, it will tempt us to believe that God has abandoned us. That malware virus will make us believe that the bad guy is always going to get away with it, but there is no such thing as getting away with it in our God's universe. He is just. Vengeance is the Lord's. And as you believe this, as you go to God and cry out to him, some things will happen in your heart.

You will be free to stop trying to get revenge. You don't have to get revenge when you know God has promised vengeance.

You will be free to forgive. Is there someone who you have a hard time forgiving? Cry out to the Lord for justice. He can help you forgive.

And you will be free to show mercy and be patient with sinners.

You probably, if you have seen, we will just close with this, Edmond Dantes in the Count of Monte Cristo, he took sweet vengeance, didn't he? It made for a great movie, just beautiful to watch. That's your sense of justice. That's why you love that movie. But my plea to you this morning is simple. Let Christ get your vengeance. It will be swift, and it will be perfect. So let us be a people who cry out to the Lord with our complaint and cry out to the Lord for justice and see him act. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for this promise in Psalm 10. That in the face of great evil, in the face of injustice, you have promised to act. Lord, help us to believe that, and I pray that you would remind us in those moments when we are angry and we witness injustice, remind us to cry out to you. And I pray, Lord, that you would answer those calls. I pray all this in Jesus' name, Amen