(Read before reading the Psalms) This morning we return to our series on Psalms that point us to the person and work of Jesus Christ *indirectly*. We are currently looking at Psalms of DIS-orientation – Psalms that deal with seasons of hurt, suffering and the chaos of life. And these are more commonly known as lament Psalms. And, so far, we have looked at an individual lament and a community lament. Well, today is our last Sunday in the Psalms of DIS-orientation. Next week, God willing, we will begin with the first of two or three Psalms of RE-orientation to conclude the series. But today we are going to look at a special category of lament Psalm called the **Imprecatory** **Psalms**.

To imprecate means to call for bad things to happen to someone. For example, I once heard or read an Arabic imprecation that went – may the fleas of a thousand camels infest your armpits. And every culture has imprecations of one sort or another. And there are several Psalms that are imprecatory. And we have two of them before us today – Psalms 109 and 137. So, let’s read them.

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Psalms like the two we have just read are sometimes referred to as ‘**angry Psalms**.’ And that is because the Psalmist is asking God to physically and materially punish people. And in Psalm 109, it was not just the wicked individuals that he wanted punished, but their children and parents also! And in Psalm 137, he describes as “*blessed*” the person who took the babies of Babylon and smashed them against the rock! And so, as one commentator has said, “The imprecatory psalms are, for many, among the most uncomfortable, perplexing, even morally [disgraceful] portions of the Bible.”

Now, I am sure we all get the anger. I mean, imagine the attitude of the people of Ukraine towards President Putin and the Russian army right now! They will be hungry for vengeance and justice. And you know that imprecation I told you about earlier; the one about fleas and armpits? Well, I must confess to wishing that upon bullies when I was young. And I am sure we can all remember being on the receiving end of bullying or crime or injustice, such that we were filled with anger to the point of wanting terrible things to happen to our oppressors. So, we can understand and even sympathize with these Psalms, but how can they be in any way good? For God’s people were expected to add their loud ‘Amen!’ to these Psalms, and they were to use them to teach their children about life as the people of the Lord.

So, what are we to make of the imprecatory or ‘angry Psalms’? How do they fit with the words of the Lord Jesus that we read earlier – love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, and do good to those who do evil to you? Should we just ignore them as an awkward part of the Old Testament? Are they, as many professing Christians allege, incompatible with being a New Testament believer?

Well, let’s dismiss suggestions like that right away! **2 Timothy 3:16-17** says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work*.” And “*All Scripture*” means ALL Scripture, including the OLD Testament! So, we cannot ignore the imprecatory Psalms. What we must do instead is to understand them and see how they are profitable for us as believers still today. And what we are going to see is that the ‘angry Psalms’ teach us very important truthes about God’s plan of salvation and life in the church of Jesus Christ. And we should sing the ‘angry Psalms’ and pray prayers like the ‘angry Psalms.’

And we will see this using the same headings that we have used with the last few sermons; we will briefly look at the **Setting** and the **Structure** of these Psalms, and then we will spend most of our time considering the **Saviour** in these Psalms.

1. So, first of all, some brief words about the **setting** of these Psalms.
   1. And we begin with Psalm 109.
      1. As the title says, it is “*a Psalm of David*.” And this Psalm is as **individual** imprecatory Psalm; it is all about “*I*” and “*me*” and “*my*.”
      2. It was originally written in relation to a situation in David’s life: He had been attacked without cause, as we see in verse 3. He speaks about “*lying* *tongues*” in verse 2, hatred in verse 3, and false accusation in verse 4. And this betrayal was coming from those David had shown love and kindness to, as we see in 4. And we see more about this in verses 16-20 as David lays out the reasons for his complaint – his betrayers were unkind, unjust, and full of curses and false accusations.
      3. And this situation led to David feeling and depressed and physically ill, as we see in verses 22-24.
      4. And it was his desire that the Lord would punish these betrayers.
      5. So, that is the setting of Psalm 109 – David had been betrayed by those he had loved.
   2. Let’s look now at Psalm 137.
      1. Psalm 137 has no title. And unlike Psalm 109, it is a **community** imprecatory Psalm; it is about “*we*” and “*our.*”
      2. And the opening verses locate the Psalm in the context of the **exile** **to** **Babylon** of the people of Israel. And while in Babylon, their captors were demanding that the Jews sing some of their “*songs of Zion*” as entertainment for the Babylonians. But the people could not bear the thought of singing these songs to entertain their captors. And this filled them with anger and a desire that the Lord would avenge them against the Babylonians.
      3. But notice also the reference to “**the Edomites**” in verse 7. The people of Edom were the descendants of Esau. So, they were close relatives of the people of Israel who were descendants of Jacob. But instead of supporting Israel in her hour of need, they had sided with Babylon and even moved into empty Israelite territory after the exile. And so, the people of Israel sought vengeance against the Edomites also.
2. So, that is the **setting** of these Psalms. Let’s look, in the second place, at the **Structure** of these Psalms.
   1. And we begin again with Psalm 109.
      1. In verses 1-5 we have the **complaint** that I explained when we looked at the setting of the Psalm – David had been betrayed by those he had loved. And David returns to this complaint in verses 16-20.
      2. In verses 6-15 we get the **imprecation**; David calling on God to punish these betrayers or enemies. He wants them dead, and sooner rather than later. He wants them to lose their positions in society, as we see in verse 8. And as I said in the introduction, David even asked the Lord to curse the children of his enemies in verses 9-13, and the parents of his enemies in verses 14-15!
      3. Verses 21-29 are David’s **invocation** or cry for help from the Lord. He asks the Lord to see the effect of his enemies’ actions on his physical and mental well-being, and to punish these enemies.
         1. Now, it is very important to note here that this was not David sulking because someone had upset him and wanting personal revenge. No, David was **the Lord’s anointed King**. In fact, the vast majority of the imprecatory Psalms are by King David. So, these betrayers had sinned against the Lord’s King.
            1. Think back to when Saul was King and David had opportunities to assassinate Saul. Do you remember those stories, boys and girls? Saul was sleeping in the cave and David cut off the corner of his robe. And David’s advisers had urged David to kill Saul. But each time, David said, I cannot do that. He is the Lord’s king. The Lord put him there. And now David was the Lord’s king.
         2. And so, to sin against David was to **sin against the Lord**. And that is why, in verse 21, David says, “*But you, O God my Lord, deal on my behalf for your name’s sake*.” And in verse 27, when these punishments came down upon these men, David said, “*Let them know that this is your hand; you, O Lord, have done it*.”
         3. So what David was requesting was not about personal vengeance but about bringing honour and vindication to the Lord!
         4. And this is a vital part of understanding the imprecatory Psalms. And we will come back to this later.
      4. But the last part of Psalm 109 is verses 30-31 and the **expression of confidence**. There, David praised the Lord and professed his faith in the covenant faithfulness of God.
   2. Well, let’s look next at Psalm 137.
      1. In verses 1-4 we have the **complaint** that I explained when we looked at the setting of the Psalm; The people of Israel had been exiled to Babylon, and they were being asked by their captors to sing some of their “*songs of Zion*” as entertainment.
      2. So, in verses 5-9 we get the **imprecations**. The first part are kind of self-imprecation; with the references to the right hand and the tongue, they were saying, If any of us forget Jerusalem, then may we lose the ability to play the harp and sing, completely. But then in verses 7-9 we get the imprecations against the Babylonians and the Edomites, including the call to the Lord to bless those who repaid the Edomites for what they did to Israel and to bless those who smashed the babies of Babylon to death!
      3. Now, notice again that this Psalm is also **not about *personal* revenge**. And again, it is vitally important that we understand this. The concern of Psalm 137 is what has been done to God’s covenant people and to Jerusalem, the city of the Lord. So again, ultimately, the sin of the Babylonians and Edomites was sin against the Lord. And it is this that grieved the people and led them to call on the Lord to punish them.
3. So, that’s the basic **setting** and **structure** of these Psalms. Now, we want to see the **Saviour** in these Psalms. How do they point us to Christ? Why are these Psalms good? Why should we sing these Psalms and pray prayers like these Psalms?

* 1. Hands up here who has searched for something on Google and then found that your Facebook feed is full of ads for exactly that thing? It’s a bit scary, isn’t it. Well, it gets worse! We recently tried to clip our dog’s claws, but she would not let us. So, we ended up taking her to a local grooming place and the technician said that that breed of dog hates nail clippers. So, she used a small nail grinder tool, instead. And of course, we have talked about this at home. We didn’t search for it; we just talked about it. And you know what? Theodore has had ads for dog nail grinders on his Facebook feed! Now, I don’t know how that works, but I had something similar, for having begun to work on these Imprecatory Psalms, what do I see on my Facebook feed? An article about Imprecatory Psalms! It was by a Dr. Trevor Laurence, who I have never heard of before, but it is really good. And I mention this because I have borrowed some of his thoughts for this part of the sermon.
  2. But we will come to that soon. The first point to note here is one we have made with each Psalm we have looked at in this series, which is that the Psalms were **the** **Psalms of Jesus**. Jesus sang and prayed these Psalms when He was on earth. And I am hoping that you were already thinking about that as we discussed Psalm 109. For David lamented the fact that ones he had shown love to were attacking him without cause, falsely accusing him, hating him, and betraying him. Does that remind you of anyone else in the Bible? The Lord Jesus, right! And all this was done to Him by His *own* people – people of the covenant community! And Psalm 109 also ends with an expression of confidence that the Lord will save the Psalmist “*from those who condemn his soul to death*.” So, Psalm 109 is the prayer of Jesus! It is how He would have asked His Father to punish His accusers and to deliver Him from death.
  3. But the next thing we need to consider is **the relationship between Imprecatory Psalms and Jesus’ words in Matthew 5** about loving your enemies. For the position of many, including professing Christians even, is that because of Jesus words it is not right for Christians to sing the imprecatory Psalms or to pray prayers like them. But congregation, that is just wrong thinking. It is really poor Bible interpretation, and it strips God of His majesty and holiness. The world is perfectly OK with a God who is only love and a Christianity that does not judge anyone. But that is not the God or the Christianity of the Bible.
     1. As another commentator puts it, “The comparison between Psalms 109 and 137 and Jesus’ statements in Matthew 5 … is like comparing apples and oranges. Jesus is clearly speaking against personal revenge, which the Old Testament is also against.” And as we noted in connection with both Psalms, they are not about personal revenge.
     2. And alongside this observation, have a look at **Matthew 23** sometime. For there Jesus pronounced seven woes or curses on the Pharisees! And in **Galatians 1:8-9**, Paul said about anyone who preaches a false gospel, “*Let him be accursed*.” And just so we are clear, Matthew 23 and Galatians 1 are in the New Testament.
     3. So, to say that the imprecatory Psalms are not appropriate for New Testament Christians because of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5 is just plain wrong.
  4. But back to Dr. Laurence and his article. He began it by saying, “Instead of asking what in the world the psalmists are praying, … [a better question to ask is] … **In what world are the psalmists praying**?” And I think that question is really helpful. You see, to understand the imprecatory Psalms, you have to understand the story of salvation as it is unfolded in the Bible.
     1. Way back in the Genesis, God established the **Garden of Eden** as the place where He would dwell with His people. And Adam was the Lord’s king in that Garden. He was to exercise dominion and extend the Garden. So, as the Lord’s king in the Garden, what should Adam have done when the serpent turned up? He should have recognized the serpent as the enemy of God and rebuked him and kicked him out of the garden. But is that what he did? No. Instead, he listened to the serpent and fell into sin. In other words, he chose the devil over God. And what were the consequences for Adam in relation to the garden? He was kicked out of the garden and barred from re-entering by an angel.
     2. But before Adam was kicked out, God had given him **a promise**. He said that a descendant of Eve would crush the head of the serpent. It is the first promise of Jesus in history. But this promise also recognized that from that moment on, **humanity would be divided into two groups** – those who followed Jesus and those who followed the serpent. And there would be a constant enmity or conflict between these two groups. The followers of the serpent would always be trying to crush Christ and His people. And this, brothers and sisters, is the story of the Bible.
        1. We see it with Cain killing Abel.
        2. We see it with Pharoah trying to destroy the Israelites.
        3. We see it with Philistines and the Assyrians and the Babylonians trying to destroy Israel.
        4. We see it with Haaman trying to destroy the Israelites in the Book of Esther.
        5. We see it with Herod ordering all the 2 year old and under male children to be killed after Jesus was born.
        6. We see it with the crucifixion.
        7. We see it with the persecution of the early church and the church today.
        8. But the end goal of God’s promise to Adam was a Messiah who would restore what Adam had ruined. A new garden! A new creation. A new place where God will dwell with His people in perfect peace and joy and fellowship! But that is still to come. For now though, the conflict between those who belong to Christ and those who belong to the devil continues.
     3. And so, getting back to the story of salvation as it unfolds in the Bible, in **Genesis 12**, God chose Abraham as the head of His covenant people. And listen to what God said to Abraham: “*I will make of you a great nation, and … I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse*.” Did you catch that? “*Him who dishonours you I will curse*.”
        1. So, in **Old Testament times**, it was essentially as simple as this: If you were Israel or you blessed Israel, the Lord blessed you. But if you were not Israel and especially if you opposed Israel, the Lord cursed you.
           1. And so, when David prayed that the Lord would curse his enemies, and when the people of Israel prayed that the Lord would punish Edom and Babylon, they were simply calling on the Lord to do what He said He would do. They were asking the Lord to curse/punish those who ***unrepentantly*** dishonoured Israel or Israel’s king.
        2. But as we fast forward to the **New Testament**, the nation of Israel had failed to live in covenant with God. So, God sent a better Adam, a better Israel, a better David – His Son, the Lord Jesus. But He was dishonoured by His own people, who rejected Him and eventually crucified Him. And that is why Jesus pronounced the seven curses on the Pharisees – because they unrepentantly dishonoured the Lord’s Anointed One.
        3. But Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to rule as the King of His new kingdom. And what is that kingdom? **The church**! So, it is no longer one people and one nation, it is God’s people in every nation; the church is now ‘the ‘great nation’ through which Christ blesses the world as the gospel is proclaimed and people receive Him as their king.
           1. In **1 Peter 2**, believers are described as “*a holy nation, a people for His own possession*.” And in **Revelation 1:6**, John says of believers that Christ “*made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father*.”
           2. And God’s promise still stands: Those who bless the church of Christ will be blessed but those who dishonour the church of Christ the Lord will curse.
        4. So, let me ask you this: Does everyone now love Christ and His word and His church? Are there no longer any enemies of Christ and His people? Is the devil no longer trying to destroy the church? Are Christians no longer persecuted and killed for being followers of Jesus? Do politicians no longer try and bring in ungodly legislation that is contrary to God’s commands? Are there no longer preachers of a false gospel? And the answer to all these questions is No. There are still enemies of Christ and His word and His people today and there will be until He comes again.
           1. It is why we are told in **1 Corinthians 15** that Jesus will return to earth and deliver “*the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet*.”
           2. And it is why we are told to “*put on the full armour of God, that [we] may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil,*” and that we must “*not love the world or the things of the world*,” and why we are warned about antichrists and THE antichrist in 1 John 2.
        5. Until Christ comes again, there will be those who dishonour Him and His nation – the church.
  5. And if we understand this, then **we will pray about it**. And our first prayer will be that the enemies of Christ and His Word and His people would repent and receive Christ as their king. Yes? But if they will not repent, and that is the key issue here, if they remain unrepentant enemies of Christ, then we must pray that the Lord would defeat and curse and punish His enemies, if not now, then in hell.
     1. In another of the imprecatory Psalms, **Psalm 56**, King David says to the Lord, “*Put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?*” He wanted the Lord to record every tear that he cried about those who dishonoured the Lord and His King and His people, and pay it back on those who refused to repent of their wickedness.
     2. And we have often spoken about our brother, **Pastor Wang Yi** of the early Rain Covenant Church in China. Imprisoned for 9 years, separated from his wife and child, just for following Jesus. A church that has been shut down. And you can be sure that he is asking the Lord to bring his jailers to repentance, but if they will not repent, that the Lord would put his tears in a bottle and record them in His book and pay them back for their evil.
     3. And in **Revelation 6:9-10**,which, once again, is in the New Testament, here is what we read, “*When [the Lamb of God] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*” And in **Revelation 15**, “*One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever … Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."*” Brothers and sisters, the Lord does keep the tears of His children in bottles, and He collects our prayers over injustice in golden bowls of wrath.

And that is why Dr. Laurence calls the ‘Angry Psalms’ **Justice Songs of the Sons of God**. And I think that is a beautiful way to describe them! We should call on the Lord to defeat His unrepentant enemies and to visit on them His terrible wrath. Persecutors of Christians and those who promote abortion and euthansia and so-called ‘marriage equality,’ if they will not repent, are enemies of Christ and His word and His people. And dear Christian, if you will not sing these Psalms or pray prayers like this, then you are really no different than Adam and Eve in the Garden who failed to recognize the serpent for who he is and God for who He is!

And if you do pray prayers like this, then you will also **pray for the return of Jesus**! For then will come the new creation – the new heavens and new earth – the place of His perfect rule and no more enemies! So, Come Lord Jesus. Come quickly. And all God’s people said, Amen!