

Home Church Discussion Guide for Sunday, October 25

“Prayer and Activity: Vengeance, Catharsis, and Compassion”

This week, we will be looking at the theme of prayer and activity as we consider the imprecatory psalms. Begin by asking your group to consider what an imprecatory psalm might be, based on their reflection of this week’s video. The verbal form of the word imprecatory, imprecate, means to call down evil or curses. While we might think primarily of the psalms a collection of praises, there are quite a few imprecatory psalms found in the book, where God’s people call out to Him in a raw and honest way as they experience great injustice, asking Him to intervene and to curse those responsible.

This week, we’ll look at Psalm 109 as a specific example of an imprecatory psalm. Work through Psalm 109 by reading through the sections and providing commentary from the video, allowing your group to also provide reflection from their own reading and study.

Verses 1-5

- Psalm 109 was written by David as he was in a place where wicked people had come against him – David had showed kindness and love to these people, but they have responded by returning hate and attack.
- Note that David pours out his heart so honestly to the Lord – is this true of us when we are in this type of situation? Are we bold enough to be honest with the Lord about the injustice we experience?

Verses 6-20

- The first common element of imprecatory psalms is that they involve asking God to call down curses on those who perpetuate injustice. We see David’s prayer takes a turn here, calling the Lord to send various curses on those who have attacked him, to let them suffer in the same way he has suffered because of their wickedness.
- This part of the prayer might make us very uncomfortable, as we also remember Jesus’ words to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). How do we reconcile these two things? While we might want to shy away from passages such as these, because they are part of Scripture, we must treat them as such, rather than failing to appreciate God’s word as it has come to us. Wayne points out that, when we come to verses like these, we do so with the acknowledgement that evil and injustice do exist in the world, that things are not as they ought to be.
- Wayne pointed out that, perhaps we have difficulty with these verses, in part, because we live in a world where we are fairly insulated, where we don’t experience a great deal of evil and injustice. Do you find this to be true in your own life? When was the last time you were angry because of injustice you saw or experienced, when you were moved with anger because you recognized that things are not as they should be, and wickedness seems to abound in the world?

Verses 21-31

- The second common element of imprecatory psalms is that they often feature the psalmist pouring out his heart to God honestly while desiring to entrust his soul to the Father. We see David model this so well for us in Psalm 109.
- The third common element of imprecatory psalm is that they give an opportunity to entrust justice to the Lord, rather than taking justice into our own hands. Ask your group to reflect on how we see this in the life of Jesus. As Christ made His way to the cross, He trusted His fate was in the hands of His Father. How is Christ's response an example for us in this regard? No matter how much we are harmed by evil, we don't take matters into our own hands as final judge and jury. We understand our own sin, guilt, and need for the Lord, and we desire that others come to know Him – to repent and be reconciled to Him.

Wayne ended his lesson by referencing theologian Derek Kidner, who gave these three helpful points about imprecatory psalms. Finish your discussion by touching on these points briefly and asking your group for their response and reflection.

1. These psalms help us understand the reality of wickedness in the world.
2. These psalms help us recall the impact of wickedness in the world – we don't sit mildly by, unaffected by cruelty, but our hearts feel the force of their anger as they experience the reality of wickedness in the world and the truth that things are not as they should be.
3. These psalms help us to recognize our calling as believers – that while we come before the Lord with honesty, pouring out our hearts to Him, we recognize that our calling as believers is to pray down reconciliation, not judgment. As we long for justice and righteousness to come to earth, even as if it in heaven, we also are called to pray for those who enact injustice, that those who are opposed to God's purposes might come to know Him and to be reconciled to Him, that they would willingly bow their knee to Him as King of kings and Lord of lords.