



PSALMS

the songs Jesus prayed

OVERVIEW FOR PSALMS

Jesus grew up with a Psalter - book of songs (hymnbook) that were sung as prayers. The Psalms were written in response to the composer's experience of God's presence or perceived absence during a specific episode in life. Each Psalm is written with a general form so that others could use the Psalm to address similar experiences through song and prayer. The Psalms provided a means and a template which formed and trained God's people how to approach God with every kind of experience known to man. God wants us to come to him with our whole being.

There are several different genres that provide ways for us to express our hearts to God and provide a means to commune with God and experience God meet us and transform us in the process.

PART 2: SONGS OF RETRIBUTION

Read the text: Psalm 58

To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David.

Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?

Do you judge the children of man uprightly?

No, in your hearts you devise wrongs;

your hands deal out violence on earth.

The wicked are estranged from the womb;

they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

*They have venom like the venom of a serpent,
like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
so that it does not hear the voice of charmers
or of the cunning enchanter.
O God, break the teeth in their mouths;
tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!
Let them vanish like water that runs away;
when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted.
Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime,
like the stillborn child who never sees the sun.
Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns,
whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away!
The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.
Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
surely there is a God who judges on earth."*

Psalm 58 is one of the Imprecatory Psalms, a group of raw and visceral Psalms flowing from a place of deep pain and hurt. In these Psalms, we see the writers dealing honestly with the evil they've experienced in our broken world. These Psalms give us permission to be honest, a process for how to cry out for justice, and a pathway towards true justice and liberation.

1. What do you do with evil? How do you tend to respond to injustice? Do you ignore and suppress your feeling of anger over it? Do you minimize it? Do you internalize it and let anger brew inside you? Do you vindicate it, responding with anger and even violence? Or do you verbalize it and release it into God's hands? Share with each other the ways you most often respond to the evil and injustice in our world when it affects you.

2. The Imprecatory Psalms give us permission to be honest with God about the anger or anguish we are feeling. If we don't pray honestly to God about it, we will internalize the anger and pay for it ourselves. Take time to be honest with each other about the

pain you've experienced. Give each other permission to be honest and then pray for one another, helping each other name these feelings and then release them into the hands of the God who is more angry than you about evil and can actually do something about it.

3. Understanding Jesus' death and resurrection changes how we view evil and oppression. It affirms the reality of evil and provides confidence that it will be judged. Yet, it also tells us that we're part of the problem and deserve God's judgment. In the cross, we're reminded that we did not have to bear the weight of God's wrath for the evil we've done because Jesus bore it for us. In the resurrection, we're reminded that evil will not win the day, but will one day be defeated once and for all. How does Jesus' death and resurrection tangibly change how you think about the evil that has been committed against you and others?

Reading the Psalms This Week

Take time to read and meditate on more Imprecatory Psalms. Pick one of these Psalms to read and pray. Imagine feeling the injustice and evil that the Israelites had experienced. Imagine longing for justice and judgment against evil as they did. Use these as a guide for crying out for justice in specific ways. Practice being honest about your anger and yet giving your desire for vengeance into the hands of God. If you're not currently experiencing these feelings, think about those who are being oppressed and pray as they might pray. Ultimately, with each Psalm, think about how Jesus brings fulfillment to this prayer. The bold numbers may be good ones to start with.

Psalm 5, 35, 40, 56, **58**, **69**, 79, **109**, 137