

November 7, 2021

STRUGGLES, PRAYER, AND THE MIGHT OF OUR GOD

Psalm 10

*(7 of 11 in a series of selected Psalms)*

Last week I think I had two different people tell me after the service that Psalm 16—the psalm we looked at last week—was their favorite psalm. I had another talk to me about how looking at that psalm twelve years ago has been used of the Lord in his life. Interestingly, I had no one tell me so far this week that Psalm 10 is their favorite psalm. No one has talked to me about how they meditate on this psalm in order to comfort or encourage them during hard times. And there's a reason for that, isn't there? The first eleven verses of Psalm 10 speak of all that's going wrong in the world. That's typically not what most of us are drawn to. If you read the verses, thinking about real people facing real wickedness, then it can be almost too much to take in.

This, obviously, is why no one shouts, "Psalm 10, of course," when asked what their favorite psalm is. It's too real. "If I wanted to see all that's going wrong with the world," you might think, "I'll watch the evening news." And yet there's something comforting about turning to the Scripture and reading something like Psalm 10. It's a reminder to us that the Bible is truthful, and our God is trustworthy. It's a reminder that the Bible doesn't try to whitewash bad situations and a reminder that our God knows what we mean when we speak of the evil we confront in our world feeling overwhelming at times. And it may be that Psalm 10 is comforting to you personally.

What I mean is that you may have come today hoping that today wasn't a day of pomp and circumstance where we magnificently try to act like everything is beautiful in the world because you know it isn't. Your life isn't what you imagined it would be. Your dreams feel like they're coming apart at the seams. You don't need anyone to remind you that sin takes its toll on this world and those in it because you feel it, both in yourself and in those around you. So you weren't ready to come in and smile and answer, "Fine," when someone asks you how it's going. You feel more like crying or asking someone if they can give you a reason to hope in the midst of your mess. And this is what Psalm 10 is helpful for. It speaks to us in the midst of situations like that—so dark we cannot see and so seemingly hopeless that we feel paralyzed and at a loss. In Psalm 10 the Lord speaks to us and says, "I know. I see. And here is why you can have hope." So my prayer as we look at this psalm this morning is that you may both be strengthened in your walk and enlightened in terms of the path believers showed follow in situations of great darkness. And I want to show this to you by looking at the psalm in light of three truths. The first is that the world can be so evil it can feel like God is hiding.

**The world can be so evil it can feel like God is hiding**

As the psalmist opens this psalm, he speaks of the fact that it feels like God has distanced himself and is hiding. He asks the Lord, "Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (v. 1). The reason he asks these questions is because it seems that

God is doing nothing about the wickedness around him. And he's convinced of God's knowledge, might, and power. In other words, if he thought God were unaware of the situation or too weak to do something about it, then God would not be worthy of this complaint. You don't turn to your toddler in the midst of your house being broken into and ask him, "Why are you letting this happen?" If he could speak, your child could say, "What do you think I'm able to do about it?" But God isn't like that. He *can* do something about it. And yet he isn't doing anything from the psalmist's perspective, and so he feels that God is distant and even hiding while all of this is going on.

But what exactly is going on that causes the psalmist to ask this question? He describes the situation in verses 2-11. He writes, "In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor; let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised" (v. 2). Now, that second statement—"Let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised"—could indeed be translated that way. And if so, the psalmist is voicing a brief prayer that the wicked would be caught in their own snares. But it could also be translated to communicate that the *poor* will be caught, as you can translate it something like, "They [the poor] will be taken in the devices they [the wicked] have conceived."<sup>1</sup> And I tend to think that is the best translation because I think it best fits the context. In other words, the psalmist will pray. He does that in verse 12. But right now he's describing the terrible situation he sees in the world around him. The poor—who have less means to defend themselves—are being taken advantage of. The wicked are pursuing them and catching them in the schemes they've devised.

In verses 3-4 we're let in on what's going on in the hearts of these wicked men. They're boasting about the desires of their souls. The things that they should feel shame in, they're boasting about. And I'm sure this is something we've witnessed in our own lives, such as your friend or co-worker telling you about the immorality he hopes to pursue or experienced over the weekend. In 2018 there was a public published under the title, *Shout Your Abortion*, that was described as a collection of "photos, essays, and creative work" whereby women could celebrate and proclaim this vile act of ending the lives of their children while in the womb. Surely we know that the psalmist isn't exaggerating when he speaks of the wicked as boasting of their wicked desires.

He notes that the wicked man renounces the Lord and declares, "There is no God" (v. 4). This may signal that he's speaking as a professing atheist, but because he acknowledges the Lord in v. 11 it may be his way of saying that God is no threat to him. That is to say, he renounces the Lord, acts in wickedness, and he expects the Lord will be silent and inactive—refusing or unable to do anything about it.

But it's not just that the psalmist sees the wicked acting in his high-handed, rebellious ways, he also notes that "his ways prosper at all times" (v. 5). It would be one thing if the wicked were acting sinfully but bearing the consequences of sin, but that's not what's going on here. They're

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Ross translates it this way. *A Commentary on the Psalms, vol. 1-41* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 315.

seemingly prospering. This reminds us of Psalm 73 where Asaph notes that he almost stumbled in his faith because everywhere he looked he saw the prosperity of the wicked, and it's hard to bear. I remember a single girl one time bemoaning that some of her friends who were professing believers were walking in sexual immorality while she was trying to obey the Lord, and yet she was the one home alone and lonely on Friday evenings while everything seemed to be working out for them. This is how the psalmist feels. They're doing evil, and yet they're prospering. They're not thinking a thing about the judgments of God (v. 5).

And this rebellious arrogance runs rampant as the psalmist tells us that the wicked thinks nothing bad will happen to him (v. 6). This arrogance, in turn, leads to him only increasing his attacks on those who are weak. We read in verses 7-10, "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."

It's painful to read, isn't it? The helpless and poor are abused. There's nothing they can do. I can still remember a scene when I was in elementary school where a kid named Ryan jumped another kid, William, at recess. Ryan was popular, came from a wealthy family, was funny, and seemed to have everything going for him. William was a bit overweight, poor, never had nice clothes, and had some slight disabilities. And I can still see the scene in my head today as Ryan decided to run over toward William and push him down on the ground, leaving him wounded, dirty, and confused at what just happened. And what just happened was simple wickedness. Ryan just wanted a laugh and to show off his superiority. It happened so quickly no one could really respond to prevent it, but even as I think of it today, thirty years later, it makes me sick at my stomach. I desperately wish I could go back and stop it, help William up, or be able to stand in his place. But I can't, and I'm just left with this feeling of sickness—the same sickness I feel reading verses 7-10. These are the kinds of scenes the psalmist is describing.

Now, imagine that you are watching a scene like this unfold in front of you. You're watching the poor and helpless one "crushed, sink down, and fall" (to use the language of verse 10), and you're sitting there helpless to do anything about it. Maybe you've seen a video like this before (though I generally try to avoid them) where someone is being hurt, and no one is doing anything to help the victim. They're just standing and watching. That's what the psalmist is describing. He's looking at the world, seeing all this injustice, and he knows that if the Lord desired, he could put a stop to it. But instead, it seems that the Lord is far away, hiding.

But what makes it even more confusing is that it's not just that there are all kinds of evils taking place, but the Lord himself is being mocked. The psalmist writes in verse 11, "He says in his heart, 'God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.'" The wicked is mocking the Lord for his inactivity, assuming he'll do nothing. Again, it's painful, isn't it?

But the helpful thing about these first eleven verses is that they're a reminder to us that we live in a world that can be so evil that it can feel like God is hiding. And the reason I say this is helpful

for us is because this might describe how you feel right now in your life. And if it is, my guess is that the enemy is whispering to you at every opportunity, “The Lord doesn’t care” or “This is your fault” or “God is punishing you” or the like. Right? Isn’t that how the accuser works? He says to us that if things are bad, then we better know that it’s related to the Lord’s judgment against us. And so we can be tempted not only to feel pain and confusion during these seasons where it feels like the wicked are prospering all around us but also a desire to distance ourselves from the Lord, thinking he is against us.

And yet here is the psalmist, letting us know that he’s stood in our shoes. He’s watched the world seemingly fall apart around him, the wicked prospering, and evildoers mocking the Lord the whole time without seeing God intervene at all. In other words, if this experience is yours, it doesn’t mean that you don’t know the Lord. This is simply the experience that believers have known at times throughout history. This is a *Christian* experience. So, be comforted. And yet the point of this psalm is not simply to be comforted in a passive position, merely watching life as it unfolds. The psalmist reminds us in verses 12-15 that we have the privilege of praying in these moments.

### **We have the privilege of praying in these moments**

What’s interesting about Psalm 10 is that it isn’t mere lament. Crying out in our heart to the Lord is good, but the psalmist is not content merely to share his complaint and note his pain. He begins to ask the Lord to do something. In verse 12 he writes, “Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted.” He begins to pray for the Lord to act. He knows God isn’t hiding. He knows the Lord isn’t absent. And so he asks the Lord to act. He begins praying.

And then he uses his prayer as a means to voice to the Lord and remind himself of what is true. In verse 13 he asks, “Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, ‘You will not call to account?’” Now, notice how this question is a change. Instead of asking God why he stands far away or hides himself in times of trouble (as he does in verse 1), now he’s asking why the wicked dares makes a declaration like this about God. Why does the wicked think God will not call them to account? The psalmist wonders this because he knows that God will. He writes in verse 14, “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.”

Note how the psalmist—in prayer—reminds himself of truths he knows. The wicked says that God “will never see” (v. 11) what he is doing, but the psalmist notes that God *does* see. He notes each act of mischief and rebellion going on. The wicked may declare that God has hidden his face, but the psalmist knows that God sees and notes what is going on so that he may take it into his hands. God will act. It may not be today. But there is a time coming when God will show himself. The psalmist reminds himself that though the helpless are being crushed, they commit themselves to the Lord for good reason: God helps the helpless. The psalmist even reflects back in the past on how he has seen God as the helper to the helpless.

Isn't this instructive for us? When we see the wicked seemingly prospering and mocking God without God obviously replying, and we ourselves wonder why God seems distant and hiding, it's an opportunity to pray, reminding ourselves of what we know to be true—especially when what we know is true seems to be contradicted by what we see.

But I also want to remind us that these verses aren't just a prayer where the psalmist is renewing his mind. He's making requests of God. He's asked the Lord to arise and lift up his hand and forget not the afflicted in verse 12. Then, in verse 15, he again prays, "Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer; call his wickedness to account till you find none." The image of "breaking the arm" of someone is the idea of disabling them from doing the evil activity. In other words, the psalmist is asking the Lord to stop the evildoer in his tracks. Stop him from carrying out his evil intentions. In fact, he wants him to stop them to the point that there is no more wickedness, calling them to account until there is no more to deal with.

Now, when we hear that, I wonder what we think. Perhaps we think that's a silly prayer. I mean, who prays that all evildoers will be stopped? But, consider that when the Lord instructed us to pray in the Scripture. He instructed us to pray that his will would be done on earth as it is done in heaven. It may well be that our problem is that we don't pray boldly enough. How many times do we look at a situation and simply presume the Lord couldn't or wouldn't do something about it? We presume often, don't we? Now, typically when we talk about presumption in prayer, it only goes one way. Someone says, "Well, I could pray for the Lord to heal this person, but I don't want to presume on the Lord." The reality is by *not* praying for that we're presuming aren't we? We're presuming the Lord doesn't want to heal—even miraculously. I'd rather ask the Lord boldly to heal, noting of course that we'll accept his will. Similarly, let's not hold back from praying boldly, for example, asking that the Lord would stop the horrendous act of legalized abortion in our country. It's not past our Lord to bring us to a point where we look back as an entire country on our present as a despicable time where we harmed our children. When the wicked are prospering, we have the privilege of praying and praying boldly. And when we pray, we can know that one day all will be righted—the books will be balanced—which brings us to our last point.

### **We pray, knowing who God is and knowing where things are going**

In verses 16-18 the psalmist reminds himself who the Lord is. He writes in verse 16, "The LORD is king forever and ever." In verse 17 he notes that the Lord hears the desire of the afflicted, strengthens their hearts, and inclines his ear to them." In each verse there is a reminder of God's character and ways. First, he is the eternal king. Why would we feel hopeless in prayer when we remember that God rules over all and will rule forever? He reminds himself that God hears us (even in our weakness) and strengthens the hearts of those suffering so that they might persevere. This is who God is. He is all-powerful, hears our cries, and will preserve his people—no exceptions. Therefore, even today should we see Christians slaughtered by the hundreds, we can know that God is king. This isn't a scene of someone getting the upper hand on him. We can know that as our brothers and sisters cry out to him, he hears them. And not only that, but he is acting. They may well go to their deaths as part of God's purpose and plan for their lives,

but he'll be acting the whole time, strengthening them to persevere in faithfulness to the end. The psalmist prays, remembering who God is. But he also prays, remembering where things are going.

We know how things end, and so does the psalmist. He not only notes in verse 16 that God is king forever, but he writes, "The nations perish from his land." Then in verse 18, he notes that God hears our prayer and will "do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more." In other words, judgment is coming. One day the books will be balanced. One day all will be made right.

The wicked may well crush the poor and helpless and even mock the Lord, all the while prospering with God seemingly doing nothing about it. But don't be deceived. The Lord is not mocked. The Lord does not forget the afflicted. He will one day judge his enemies. One day those who saw themselves as so powerful will see that they are mere men, standing before the judge of all, and it will be a terrifying reality. One day God's merciless judgment will be a declaration to all that he did see, he didn't hide his face, and he has not forgotten.

But doesn't this reminder that the books will be balanced shed light on the glory of the cross? After all, if you and I are forgiven, it's not because this holy and righteous God decided to sweep our sins under the rug, saying, "Boys will be boys, and girls will be girls." No, he did not ignore our sin. He saw it. He took note of it. And then he sent his Son, who voluntarily came to bear the punishment that our sin deserved. Our disobedience merited God's judgment, and Christ paid our penalty for us, becoming a curse on the cross so that we might be forgiven and declared righteous in him. He rose from the dead so that in him we might have life, never bearing in ourselves the wrath of God that our sins deserved.

And because he has forgiven us, given us life, and made us his children, let us approach his throne boldly. Cry out to him in lament. Feel free to take your complaint to him. Cast your cares upon him because he cares for you. But then pray boldly, asking God to intervene, remembering who he is, and remembering that one day all will be made right. May that day come quickly. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.