

7/2/23 Christ Fellowship

“Impreca-what?” – Psalm 58

Let me give you a scenario and I want to ask you how you would pray in this situation. The scenario is you are a First Mate in the Navy in WWII and you are on a ship in enemy waters. As you stand on the deck of the ship, you first see bubbles and then you can make out the shape of a torpedo headed straight toward you. It was obviously fired from an undetected submarine and it is going to hit the side of your ship right about where you are standing in about 5 seconds. How do you pray?

Well, this is actually supposedly a true story and the young man began to pray something like this: *“Lord, stop it! Break it! God, jamb the steering vanes! Stop the motor! Detonate the warhead NOW!”* The man later said that the torpedo hit his ship...but it was a dud. It hardly scratched the paint and fell harmlessly to the bottom of the ocean.

Okay, here’s another true story for you. Let’s see how you would pray in this situation. You are shopping with your two young children in New York City this past weekend and in between stores you see a parade coming. It is a gay pride parade with men and women in various states of nudity waving rainbow flags and chanting as they march, *“We’re here! We’re queer. We’re coming for your children.”* Over and over they chant and they are coming straight for you. How do you pray?

I think you would probably pray almost the exact same way the First Mate did. *“Lord, stop it! Break their legs. Disable their tongues. Do whatever has to be done before my children see it!”* Right? Now, does that prayer mean you hate homosexuals? Maybe you should be more supportive of their first amendment rights. Maybe you should even donate some money to the cause to show you love those people. I mean, God says we should love everybody. What do you think?

Here's another true story that you all know. Every week, a new story comes out that shows that our United States government is corrupt and evil to the core. From top to bottom, left and right we see more and more politicians are crooks and pedophiles and traitors and are using our tax dollars to fund their horrible lifestyles. How should we be praying? Should we pray that God would send our president to Hell? Should we pray that certain senators and congressmen would get horrible diseases and die in agony? Of course not. We don’t pray like that do we?

There are a large group of psalms in our Bible that sound sort of like that. Not all of them are written by my buddy David but most of them probably are. David prays throughout the Psalms, asking God to deliver him from his enemies and he calls down curses on them and prays for

God's wrath to come on them in horrible ways. They are what scholars call imprecatory psalms. To imprecate means to call down a divine curse on somebody and David does it a lot. We know that scripture tells us to pray for our enemies and how many of you have tried that and it comes out, *"God...I pray for my ex-wife or my old boss or that crazy neighbor and I ask that you would please...let them get hit by a bus. Amen"*? That is an imprecatory prayer. But we aren't supposed to pray like that, are we?

Well, let's take a look at one of my favorite imprecatory psalms. In **Psalm 58**, David is in rare form. He is not being sweet and loving here. He's not. In fact, it's pretty brutal. I would give this Psalm at least a PG rating, if not PG-13. In this psalm, David is thinking about the injustice of the rulers of his day. You know. Just like today. And David is mad about it. Just like we should be. So, let's see if there is anything good we can glean from this passage. Let's read the whole **Psalm 58**. It's not long and maybe you can relate to feeling like David did.

Do you rulers indeed speak justly?

Do you judge people with equity?

2 No, in your heart you devise injustice,
and your hands mete out violence on the earth.

3 Even from birth the wicked go astray;
from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.

4 Their venom is like the venom of a snake,
like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears,

5 that will not heed the tune of the charmer,
however skillful the enchanter may be.

6 Break the teeth in their mouths, O God;
Lord, tear out the fangs of those lions!

7 Let them vanish like water that flows away;
when they draw the bow, let their arrows fall short.

8 May they be like a slug that melts away as it moves along,
like a stillborn child that never sees the sun.

9 Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns—
whether they be green or dry—the wicked will be swept away.

10 The righteous will be glad when they are avenged,
when they dip their feet in the blood of the wicked.

11 Then people will say,

“Surely the righteous still are rewarded;
surely there is a God who judges the earth.”

I found a website that had real prayers from real little kids and I thought we could probably all relate to at least some of these.

Dear God: Please send a new baby for Mommy. The new baby you sent last week cries too much. Debbie, 7

Dear God: This is my prayer. Could you please give my brother some brains. So far he doesn't have any. Angela, 8

Dear God: Please bring me a new brother. The one I got socks me all the time. Agnes, 6

Dear God: Please help me in school. I need help in spelling, adding, history, geography and writing. I don't need help in anything else. Lois, 9

Dear God: I need a raise in my allowance. Could you have one of your angels tell my father. Thank you. David, 7

Most of those are probably not appropriate for adults to pray. I think God hears those prayers and understands the motive and the heart behind them and probably answers them in ways those kids couldn't imagine. But I doubt God considers those sinful at all but we all want to pray in the right way. So, can we pray like David did or is that just an Old Testament thing? Has God changed? Is there an Old Testament way of praying and a New Testament way?

Well, in **Matthew 5**, Jesus tells us, *“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,”* In **Luke 6**, Jesus says, *“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”* So, obviously we shouldn't pray imprecatory prayers, right?

So...here's the problem with that. The Apostle Peter prayed that way. In **Acts 1**, the apostles are praying for God to send another to replace Judas and Peter quotes **Psalm 69** – most definitely an imprecatory Psalm – and says, *‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it; ‘ and ‘Let another take his office.’* [ACTS 1:20]

No, that's not as brutal as David praying for their teeth to be crushed but still imprecatory. Later on, Peter was rebuking Simon who had tried to purchase the grace of God. Peter invoked a harsh prayer, saying, *“May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if*

possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" [ACTS 8:20-23]. And you may be thinking, "Well, that Peter...he was a goofball who didn't know what to say a lot of the time. That doesn't really count." Well, I have several problems with that but for the sake of argument, let's move on.

Let's move on and see that Paul prayed imprecatory prayers too. Confronting the false prophet named Bar-Jesus, the Apostle prayed, "*You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time*" [ACTS 13:10-11].

Then again, speaking of the downfall of the Jewish people, Paul also cites **Psalm 69** when he says of Israel, "*David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.'*" [ROMANS 11:9-10]

Then also, when Paul was closing his final letter to Timothy, Paul speaks of a man who sought to injure him, and thus harm the work of God. The Apostle writes, "*Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds*" [2 TIMOTHY 4:14].

So, Peter prayed imprecatory prayers. (Say that five times fast!) And picked a pail of peppers too, I think. Peter prayed that way and Paul prayed that way and even Jesus quoted **Psalm 35**, which is imprecatory, when He said in **John 15**, "*They hated me without reason.*" And He quoted that without excuses or trying to water it down. That same Psalm requests God make my enemies be clothed with shame and disgrace. And Jesus never had a problem with that. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told not to pray that way but we are told and we see from example some very specific ways that we are to pray like that.

Notice that the ones praying this way are asking God for justice. They are never putting themselves in position to get revenge. It's not about revenge. It is asking God to bring justice to an unjust situation. And it is not about getting back at our enemies. It is wanting God to bring justice to HIS enemies. There are people who want to dishonor the name and Kingdom of God and the work of God. Those are God's enemies. And I realize that sometimes it might be hard to distinguish between God's enemies and our enemies. Because we are always right, aren't we? We are always doing God's work, right? 😊

Did you know that it is actually against the law to disrupt a church service? It is. It makes me think about the time, years ago when we were in Runaway Bay, that a police officer actually came in on Sunday morning and stopped our worship service because a member of our church

had taken her boyfriend's wallet. I'm not kidding. Some of you that were around way back then remember that. Now, I don't believe for a second that the officer who did that had any kind of malicious intent or even ill will towards our church. So, I wouldn't pray anything bad towards her, although I might pray, *"Lord, please protect our church from anything that would disrupt it, even by the cops."*

Now, because some people in our country have serious mental issues, we hear every so often about someone going into a church with a gun and shooting people. I pray all the time for God's protection over our church and that is not something I spend any time worrying about. Let me just tell you, though, that if that happened, I believe a good prayer is, ***"God, please stop him! Kill him, God. Somehow, some way, Lord, please don't let that man take another breath!"***

Praying imprecatory prayers is rare because the situations that call for them are rare. But there are times when they are called for. Let's think back to my illustration of the gay pride parade. I don't wish anything bad to happen to those people as individuals. I don't. I want all of them to come to repentance and come to have a life-changing relationship with God through His Son Jesus. And they could and I pray that they would and if they did I could party with them in Heaven and we would all say, *"Isn't God good to save us wretched people?!"*

But I do pray some kind of imprecatory prayer for that parade. I don't want anybody else to see that perversion but especially not innocent children. So, God, please stop those parades! Stop those people from making a mockery of what you have created. Stop those people from doing what goes against your will and is harmful to the family and the church. Lord, please.

It's not about getting revenge. It's about justice. I don't want to be the one to serve the justice. God, we are calling on you to serve that justice. When we see persistent, unrepentant sin, I believe we should pray to God His promises back to Him. Lord, you said in **Romans 1** that your wrath would be revealed from Heaven on those who are godless and wicked. So, we are praying right now that it would.

In **Isaiah 13**, God says, *"Thus I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud."* Lord, I pray you would. I pray first that you would bring those people to repentance but if they refuse, Lord, we call on you to submit your justice like you promised.

Did you know that when you pray the Lord's Prayer, there is an imprecatory part to that? When you pray, *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...**"* you are praying for God's will to be done on Earth like it is

in Heaven. And that sounds really nice until you really realize what that means. When you pray that you are praying for the Second Coming of Jesus and when He comes back, there will be judgment. All of God's enemies will be judged and thrown into Hell when His will is done on Earth like it is in Heaven. But again, that is not our judgment and those are not just our enemies. Those are God's enemies and we pray that He will take care of that because He said He would.

So, you can see that there are rare cases when we can and should pray imprecatory prayers like David did; and like Peter and Paul and others did. But remember, all scripture is God-breathed, as it says in **2 Timothy 3**, and when David wrote that stuff he wasn't looking for revenge. He was wanting God to bring justice. It was rarely against one person. Normally it was a group of people. It was against the enemies of God, not just his enemies. It was usually after asking God for their repentance and only if they refused and continued in persistent and unrepentant sin was the prayer prayed like that. And it was prayed according to the promises God had already made.

There are other times in scripture when imprecatory prayers are prayed. It might be as prophetic words or when suffering for one's faith. I read one commentary that seemed to be trying to water it down a bit by saying that maybe they prayed that way as a suggestion to God as to what He ought to do. Eh, that's probably not really it but thanks for playing.

There is great power in prayer. One of my favorite verses is **James 5:16** that says the fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. But there are two important words in there before "powerful and effective" and they make all the difference. The words "fervent" and "righteous" are so important in any kind of prayer, even imprecatory prayer.

"Fervent" means to have a passionate intensity. It's the word that describes a horse jumping over a barrier or an outfielder jumping and stretching out to make a catch. It takes effort. Effective prayer takes effort. Then we see the word "righteous" in there and I always say if I ever find a righteous man, I'll get him to pray for me. But this is not our righteousness that is being talked about. This is God's righteousness that has been imparted to us through our faith in His Son Jesus.

God sees us as righteous when we are true believers and followers of Jesus. And when we are righteous in God's eyes, He hears our prayers. We have to be careful when praying any kind of imprecatory prayer to pray within the guidelines modeled for us in scripture but when we do, and we are righteous and we are praying fervently, there is great power.

But we have to be true believers. Does that describe you? I bet everybody in here would say “yes” to that right now but I want you to think back to the time when you gave your life to God; that one time in your life when you told God you couldn’t do it anymore and you wanted Him to be Lord of your whole life. You asked God for forgiveness of all your sins and then repented of that lifestyle and allowed God’s Holy Spirit to come in to your life and change you and continue to change you for the rest of your life.

If you can’t think of that one time, then I want to pray with you right now. Today is the day of salvation for you. Do it right now as the music plays.