

Psalm 69 “To Imprecate or Not to Imprecate?”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

What a king we have who's so worthy of worship, that we would be his, that he would make us his. Isn't that so good? I hope it rejoices your heart.

I hope as we open his word, we see the wonderful things that he has in his law for us. We've been looking this summer at different kinds of psalms, different songs that God gives us as she just sang.

They're given to us from God to his people to shape our hearts toward wisdom. In worship, what should we sing to him? How should we talk to him?

Even in sorrow, as we saw last week with a psalm of lament. Psalm 77 showed us how vital lament is for God's people to cry out to him, not for a quick fix solution to all their problems, but to bring our griefs before him since he is a God who delivers through darkness.

[1 : 20] God wants our relationship with him to flourish, not only when we're happy, but also when we're sad. He wants to hear from you.

This morning in Psalm 69, we encounter another lament. Not surprising. I told you last week they're the most common type in the whole psalm. But we're looking at it primarily to talk about one section of it referred to as imprecatory.

That means, in case you haven't talked about it a lot this week, imprecatory means a cry to God to punish or curse his enemies.

So-called imprecatory sections account for part or all of over a dozen psalms. They've inspired many different reactions, including Christians who say we should not ever pray them, or even that the psalmist himself never should have written them.

Wow. I want us to look at an example of imprecation because you come across a lot of prayers like this in Scripture, and I think we should pray them once we rightly understand what they mean and what they don't direct us toward.

[2 : 45] Let's ask God to direct our minds and hearts as we look at his word, and then I'd like to talk us through Psalm 69 as we read it. So first, will you pray with me?

God, your heart, as we have seen it already this morning, is glorious. The holiness of God, the overflowing mercy, the kindness to lead us to repentance.

Father, we want our hearts to be more like yours, to be shaped the way yours is, and so that's why we're going to open your word together and ask your spirit to help us.

Would you do that work in us? We need you. We thank you that you love us. In Jesus' name, amen. Many of you told me this past week how helpful laments are to put words to your difficult emotions so that you can speak them to God.

I felt it would be good for us to look at another example as we read through Psalm 69. I'll comment as we go, a little bit different from usual, but then we're going to slow down at the imprecatory section around verse 22.

[4 : 07] Remember, these are the words of King David for God's people to sing or pray to him. Psalm 69 at verse 1.

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters and the flood sweeps over me.

These are poetic descriptions of being absolutely overwhelmed, right? You've felt this way before sometime.

David says, I am weary with my crying out. My throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for God. He's been crying to God for help over and over, but so far he feels no relief, only worse.

He's wearing down. He's exhausted. He's desperate for help. What's been going on? Why does he feel this way? More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause.

[5 : 21] Mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore? God, these attacks aren't fair.

Lies! All these people hate me and I haven't done anything to them. There's no cause. It's important to remember here King David is a representative of God and God's people, right?

If you are against Yahweh, you will likely be against David. Jesus uses this very verse of himself in John chapter 15.

Psalm 69, by the way, is the second most often quoted psalm in the whole New Testament. But you didn't imagine that. It's not a very familiar one. But Jesus talks about it a lot.

Here in John 15, he's talking with his followers about being hated by the world because people hated Jesus too. So Jesus says the world hates him without cause.

[6 : 25] Quoting this verse. As we've seen recently in 1 Peter, the same often goes for us because we're connected to Jesus. But David hasn't been perfect.

Verse 5. Oh God, you know my folly. The wrongs I have done are not hidden from you. Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord God of hosts.

Let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel. For it is for your sake that I've borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. I've become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's son.

You hear David confess his sin. But then his concern is not so much for himself, right? But for his failings bringing disgrace to God or to God's people.

David is suffering in many ways for God's sake. Why? Listen to this important verse.

[7 : 38] Verse 9. For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

David is being attacked because he is zealous for Yahweh. For his house, where his presence rests and his name is worshipped.

For his reputation among the peoples. For his glory to be made known and his honor defended. That's consuming, David. It's so important. Nothing else could be that important.

In John chapter 2, Jesus cleanses the temple, God's house, of the money changers.

He turns over the tables because they're dishonoring his father's house the way they're carrying on. And his disciples remember what? Psalm 69.

[8 : 38] Zeal for your house will consume me. They see it in Jesus. Don't they? The new Davidic king.

The second half of verse 9 is also applied to Jesus. This time in Romans chapter 15. Paul is teaching us to welcome one another graciously.

Even in our weaknesses and our failings. To build each other up. And his basis is that Jesus didn't live to please himself. It wasn't all about him.

But rather the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. Jesus took the slander.

The criticism. The hatred of God. And continued to love. Forgive. And welcome even his enemies.

[9 : 38] Do we extend such a gracious welcome to others? That's a good word. That's a tough challenge these days especially.

But let's keep reading. Verse 10. When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting it became my reproach. When I made sackcloth my clothing I became a byword to them.

I am the talk of those who sit in the gate and the drunkards make songs about me. The more David responds humbly and appropriately. The more they kicked him while he was down.

That's what he's saying. They hate God. So they hate David turning to God. But David keeps doing that doesn't he?

Where else can he go? Despite his increasing weariness and grief. But as for me he says my prayer is to you oh Lord.

[10 : 44] At an acceptable time oh God. In the abundance of your steadfast love. Answer me in your saving faithfulness. Deliver me from sinking in the mire. Let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters.

Let not the flood sweep over me or the deep swallow me up. Or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me oh Lord. For your steadfast love is good.

According to your abundant mercy turn to me. That is so beautiful isn't it? There's some words you can pray today wherever you are. David's heart laments to God.

He's desperate. And he pleads that steadfast covenant love that he knows won't let him go. That abundant mercy that he knows is never going to run out.

Even though he's not feeling it at the moment. He is grasping for a God that he can't presently see or feel.

[11 : 45] But he knows is his only hope against his enemies. Against his own overwhelming emotions. Man we need to be reading and praying the Psalms right?

If you're not almost finished with them in the two year Bible reading plan. And just start at the beginning. We need to be reading these Psalms. Praying them to God. Verse 17. Hide not your face from your servant.

For I am in distress. Make haste to answer me. Draw near to my soul. Redeem me. Ransom me because of my enemies. You know my reproach and my shame and my dishonor.

My foes are all known to you. Reproaches have broken my heart so that I am in despair. I looked for pity but there was none. And for comforters but I found none.

They gave me poison for food. And for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. No pity from his enemies.

[12 : 46] It seems no pity from God who sees his pain. But he just gets poisoned for food. Sour wine to drink.

Getting him nowhere with his thirst. Jesus experiences this verse on the cross. Doesn't he? John 19.

I thirst. An understatement. To fulfill scripture though sour wine. Mentioned three times here as Jesus is on the cross.

Sour wine and then it is finished. Jesus thinking Psalm 69. Even as he dies and takes God's wrath due to sin that he didn't commit.

It's unjust suffering. If ever there was unjust suffering. Jesus representative of God's people. Even to death.

[13 : 49] As he embodies and embraces these words in his last breaths. So that's a powerful reason to pray Psalm 69 yourself. But then the psalm takes a turn.

Instead of crying out for his own relief. David begins to pray for his enemies to get no relief.

Let's slow down here on this imprecatory section. Verse 22. Let their own table before them become a snare. And when they are at peace let it become a trap.

Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see. And make their loins tremble continually. Pour out your indignation upon them. And let your burning anger overtake them. May there can't be a desolation.

Let no one dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom you have struck down. And they recount the pain of those you have wounded. Add to them punishment upon punishment.

[14 : 52] May they have no acquittal from you. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living. Let them not be enrolled among the righteous. Whew. That's tough stuff.

I hope you're paying attention. You do not want to be chased by God's burning anger. Amen? Perhaps we can understand why some people avoid the imprecatory psalms.

It is too dark. Too mean. Even the psalmist shouldn't have said it. Let's not take that approach to God's word.

Given to his people. To sing. To pray to him. Okay. Let's not do that. Others will say. Well. Well it was okay.

Back then. Back in that old hateful vengeful Old Testament. But the New Testament ethic is love. Friends.

[15 : 59] That simply does not fit with the Bible. Where there is plenty of talk. Of loving neighbor and loving enemy in the Old Testament.

And there's plenty of punishment. And even curses. Imprecations. I can't read them all to you. In the New Testament. Plus remember the New Testament authors quote Psalm 69 without apology.

Including this section we'll see in a minute. So we should not neglect this psalm or the imprecatory psalms as a whole. Equally though.

We shouldn't run headlong into them. We should not misuse these sections of Scripture. Let me give us a couple of cautions. They are not for personal vengeance.

First of all these are prayers for God to act. Not actions of vengeance themselves. Vengeance is the Lord's. Cover to cover. Not ours.

[17 : 01] But further these prayers against these enemies. Are officially sanctioned by God. Against people committed to standing against God himself. And therefore his people who represent him.

You may not pray these against your rival football team this fall. Or this morning your rival swim club. You may not use them that way. Sorry to disappoint you.

Nor may you pray them against your neighbor. Whose music is too loud late at night. Or even your classmate who is consistently mean to you.

As hard as that might be. That's not what these are for. You may lament any of those situations and many others. And cry out to God.

But these imprecations are not for your personal wishes of ill will. You should indeed as you thought was the case when you came in here.

[18 : 04] Love your enemies. And pray for those who persecute you. Jesus and David would tell you that. Finally do not misuse them as a power play.

As though you will use God to keep the upper hand on those against you politically. Or socially. Or professionally. No, no, no, no.

Notice the imprecatory psalms are always prayed from a position of weakness. At being oppressed. Of desperation.

Of need for God's help and rescue. So why not just skip over them? If there are all these things we shouldn't do. Why not just skip Psalm 5 and 10 and all the other psalms like this?

Well, they are God's word. And we always do best to submit to be shaped by it in God's image. Rather than seeking to shape God's word in our image.

[19 : 10] So there's one place to start. But specifically three ways that these verses shape our hearts that we need. First, they shape our hearts to stand against God's enemies.

The more our hearts are passionate about God's glory. Consumed with zeal for his house. The more we will not stomach his glory being maligned.

We pray, don't we? For God's kingdom to come. That's the positive way to frame it. But if God's kingdom comes here on earth. That means that all other kingdoms bow or fade.

Right? We're called to stand firm. In the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged. So, Will, if it's not our personal enemies, who can we pray these about?

I need someone to have in mind. That's an important question. Y'all, it always fits with Satan and his minions, right?

[20 : 17] As our struggle is not against flesh and blood. So we can always pray, God, for the work of Satan in my life, in my family, in my church, in this world.

I pray for that destruction of that work. But there are human enemies of God and his people, too. Acts 1.20 cites Psalm 69.25 to refer to Judas.

Jesus. May his camp be desolate and no one dwell in it. No more like him, God, who would oppose the Lord's anointed.

May there not be any more like that. Jesus uses the same verse in Matthew 23.38 of Jews who reject him.

God's people who turn from Jesus and reject God's other representatives that he sent to them. They stand against God and everyone who he would send to them.

[21 : 19] Think of groups like ISIS who set themselves against the God of the Bible and against his people violently and committedly. You probably, in many cases, can include evil like human trafficking.

Where people have decided to build their livelihood around harming and abusing the image of God and other people. Thereby willfully attacking not just you or someone you love, but the people God loves.

Right? You can pray them about God's enemies even when you don't know exactly who they are. There's plenty such evil, right?

I'm just getting your wheels turning. There's plenty such evil physical and spiritual in this world that God calls us to stand against for the sake of his glory, his kingdom, and his people.

We need to pray these and have our hearts shaped for his glory against his enemies. Secondly, these verses shape our hearts to hope in God's justice.

[22 : 31] Listen, when we pray these words, we don't get to call all the shots as to how the justice is meted out. Even when there's poetic imagery or poetic justice implied to do to them what they did to us, we see from a very limited perspective.

Our hope is not in our justice. But we hate sin so much. We embrace the seriousness of our rebellion against God's design.

And we are glad that God will punish sin and vindicate the victims of it. In a world that often these days trends so soft on sin, so values individual choice that almost no choice we make can be critiqued anymore, we firmly, on the authority of God's word, remember that he establishes truth and we bow to it.

Wrong must be made right. Verse 24, pour out your wrath, your indignation. That happens in Revelation 16 as God brings eternal justice and sets all things right in his new creation.

It will happen. If you've ever been abused, unjustly accused, ruthlessly attacked, you long for justice, don't you?

[24 : 08] These words are calling you to hope ultimately in God's justice. Rather than your own or other justice you can get here, there's a more certain hope than that. Don't give me this theoretical God who's soft on sin.

Give me a God who's a biblical God, big on grace, because he's tough on sin, so he's overflowing with mercy. God is holy, holy, holy, perfectly just, altogether righteous.

So seeing sin called sin, wrong, wrong, right, right, brings him glory and us hope. Finally, these verses shape our hearts to treasure repentance in ourselves and others.

We indeed are sinners who face God's judgment, his just curse upon us unless we repent and turn to the one who took our curse on the cross.

These verses should make us hate our sin and love our Savior. Amen? But then, y'all, this is so important.

[25 : 26] Please listen. It doesn't always sound like this. If you take a single verse or poetic line, you may not hear it in every line. As we read sobering lines like this, we treasure the repentance of all others.

In the context of the Psalms and the Bible as a whole, repentance and forgiveness are always preferable, always to be desired first.

Not just in the New Testament, David too. In this very Psalm, it's calling for everything that moves to praise Yahweh, like other Psalms that want God's glory proclaimed to the nations.

Even the enemy Gentiles should know Yahweh and praise Him. That's the heart when we sing. Other Psalms even speak in their imprecations of the punishment leading God's enemies to turn to Him.

Psalm 83, 16, for example, fill their faces with shame. There's the imprecation. That they may seek Your name, O Lord. That's my heart for them ultimately.

[26 : 40] Psalm 69 is used the same way in Romans 11, where Paul pronounces a partial hardening on the Jews in order that they might repent and receive mercy.

It's understood, y'all, that we share God's heart and call for all men everywhere to repent and be saved. Even ISIS, even human traffickers.

Oh, Jesus is big enough for them. His salvation can cover them too. But if not, that's the way to read these words.

But if not, let them be blotted out with no acquittal. If they won't repent, God, this is what is just.

I was talking about these psalms this week with a wiser pastor here in our church family, Jim Simonow. I love the way he summed up these prayers.

[27 : 43] God, change them or remove their influence from the earth. God, would you change them or remove their influence from the earth?

Never pray any of these words without that heart. focusing on God's enemies, hoping in God's justice, looking for repentance before judgment.

I'm not suggesting imprecatory prayers should give you a warm, fuzzy feeling. But I am suggesting that you not skip over them.

Because they honor God. And they're used by his spirit to draw your hearts closer to his heart. If I've confused or troubled you in talking about them this morning, please come talk with me further.

I would love to talk with you. God is not a God of confusion. Sometimes his under-shepherds are. And I'd love a chance to talk with you about that.

[28 : 43] Let's finish this lament that has cried out to God, that has asked him justly to punish his enemies, and that finally trusts God to redeem and restore.

Verse 29. But I am afflicted and in pain. Let your salvation, O God, set me on high. I will praise the name of God with a song.

I will magnify him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs. A sacrifice of praise. Thanksgiving, right? When the humble see it, they will be glad.

You who seek God, let your hearts revive. For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners. Where does God's downtrodden people turn for revival?

When they need their hearts breathed life into again. When they need their needs met in a new way. Where do they turn? They turn to him in his timing. He will deliver.

[29 : 45] So let heaven and earth praise him. The seas and everything that moves in them. For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah. And people shall dwell there and possess it.

The offspring of his servants shall inherit it. And those who love his name shall dwell in it. Isn't this remarkable? I need to connect some dots for you.

The David who's experiencing the reality that representing God, being connected to him, is bringing trouble upon trouble into his life.

What does he now say? He realizes there is no better place than being connected to this God. God can be trusted, after all, to bring his promises to fruition, to make things right in the place where he promised his people would flourish, and he will not leave a single downtrodden child behind.

So especially when you're low, when you're at the end of your rope, when you're overwhelmed, cling to him, cry to him, trust him to rescue, restore, and make things right forever.

[30 : 58] He will do it. Okay, that covered a lot of ground. Many things I hope for us to take away to shape our hearts.

But three questions for our hearts to consider as we prepare to come to this table. First, how's your zeal for God's glory doing?

Are you so drawn in daily to worshiping him, to marveling at his greatness, that you would say, zeal for God's house consumes me?

Are you willing to suffer, even unjustly, for the sake of his name? Or would you compromise for the sake of your own comfort? Are you more concerned about your own reputation or God's reputation?

Singing this psalm, meditating on this psalm, draws us into a renewed zeal for God's glory. Secondly, how's your grasp of God's justice?

[32 : 07] Do you increasingly long for him to make all things right? Probably you do. The more we hurt, the more we long for that. But are you increasingly believing and trusting his promises that he will so that you don't need to take things into your own hand to defend yourself?

Has your appreciation for God's justice so sobered you into passionately seeking others that they might repent, that they might find refuge in Jesus?

Y'all, if we read and pray this psalm rightly, our love for God's justice will drive us to love for neighbor, lest anyone should face the burning anger of God's wrath described here without the covering of the blood of Jesus.

You don't want anyone to face that. Finally, how's your hope in God's Messiah? As you reflect on Psalm 69, even now, does Jesus become more needful and therefore more beautiful to you?

Are you so grateful that he is your representative before God? He is the one who suffered the reproaches of men and even more, the wrath of God poured out on him in your place so that you and other enemies of God could be forgiven as he prayed from the cross.

[33 : 45] Enemies, think about this, enemies of the holy God could not be destroyed. Even more, could be friends of God. No, it's even, it's even better than that, could be welcomed into the family as God's very own beloved children, children.

The one true son is treated as God's enemy. That the enemies of God would be welcomed in and treated as sons.

Brought, can you believe this? Brought all the way in to this table so that you will never, ever again be far from God.

you're always near to him because of Jesus. What a great and gracious savior he is. Amen? The night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and he broke it and he gave it to his disciples as I'm ministering in his name, give this bread to you and he said, take and eat.

This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And then after supper in the same way he took the cup and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood which has been shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

[35 : 10] Drink from it all of you because as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. You say that's my only hope that Jesus stood in and took God's wrath in my place.

Friends, if that is your only hope, if that's what you cling to before God, if you know that he's welcomed you into his family because of Jesus then come, come and eat.

Christians, by all rights, Jesus, consumed with zeal for God's house should have seen your sin and driven you out of it, turning over the tables behind you.

that's not what he did, is it? Instead, instead, he was driven out paying the penalty that your sin deserved so that you could be brought in because part of his zeal for God's house that so consumed him was that you would be in it with him forever and so he went to the cross for you.

Come and eat humbly, gratefully for such a savior. Friends, if you're here this morning and that's not your hope, if you haven't in your heart embraced Jesus as your only hope before God, then don't come outwardly and take these elements and say something that's not true for you inwardly by faith in Jesus.

[36 : 47] But please hear me. Would you consider coming to Jesus that you not stand on your own before a holy God? His body and blood here are offered to you to cover all your sins.

You're not a bigger sinner than anyone else in this room but all of us without exception and with eternal necessity require a big savior.

You need Jesus. Come and observe. Come ask us to pray but oh please, please come to Jesus.

Let's pray and we'll come celebrate together. Jesus, we need you. Me first. All of us.

thank you for the reminder of your love for your taking God's wrath upon yourself so that it doesn't fall on us.

[37 : 50] Renew our hope in you as we take common elements and you use them for a sacred purpose in our hearts. Do that now by your spirit in Jesus' name.

Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org In Jesus's La Mittia in Jesus'n La Mittia in Jesus's La Mittia in Jesus' name and let's pray we see with your influence the love in Jesus'suts in Jesus's the night ofnis help in Jesus's an