

God, judge my enemies

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Date: 15 July 2012

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[0 : 00] Real hatred is not something I think that I have ever experienced. Or if I have, I think God has very graciously dimmed my memory. Unjust treatment, yes.

Hatred, I don't think so. I understand the emotions of hatred. I had plenty of energy running through me the other week when I watched New South Wales go down to Queensland by one point in State of Origin 3.

I was incensed at the ridiculous commentary. I was exasperated at some of the refereeing. And I was disgusted when the Queensland crowd booed the New South Wales team after an awesome game.

We understand sometimes what it is to hate politicians. We use the language of hate to our politicians. I don't think it's a godly thing to do, but it's done. You can get some idea of the side of the political fence that I was raised on.

My grandmother, with dementia setting in, used to vehemently refer to the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam as Hitler Whitlam. And believe it or not, she was a warm-hearted human being who had been a gracious and generous landlord to many people from South East Asia 50 years ago.

[1 : 15] Put that together. I have friends in ministry who have known real hatred. A Christian leader said to me that he could name several people who were in ministry who hate him.

And they hate him for decisions he has taken which have had a huge impact on their life and on their ministry. They literally hate him. He bravely tried to honour Christ without fear or favour towards people.

Another brother was so despised for his ministry that he was driven out of his parish and his denomination. Another friend in ministry was vehemently lied against and accused of being a tool of the devil.

Hatred has been recorded since nearly the first page of the Bible. Cain slew his brother Abel, driven by envy.

He killed his brother out of jealousy. He hated the Lord's approval of his brother. Murder came from the evil turmoil which was within his own heart. Last week I quoted from John 15 when Jesus said, If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

[2 : 28] So his expectation was that his disciples, his followers, might experience real hatred on account of their faith and their faithfulness to Christ.

So Psalm 69, which I'm preaching this morning, is an anguished song by a king who is experiencing real hatred. It's a psalm of David.

It is probably written by God's anointed king a thousand years before Christ came into our world. We don't know the exact circumstances he was facing.

We do know how he feels and what he wants. And David cries out to God in utter distress and he says, Save me, O God! He's brief.

He's absolutely to the point. This is a huge cry for help. Save me, O God! And he paints a picture of how he feels. Verse 1 into verse 2, For the waters have come up to my neck.

[3 : 31] I sink in the miry depths where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters. The floods engulf me. I am worn out, calling for help. My throat is parched.

My eyes fail, looking for my God. He's a drowning man. He's staring death in the face. Water's up to his neck. No place for a foothold.

He's going under and he cannot save himself. So verse 14, Rescue me from the mire. Do not let me drown. Deliver me from the deep waters.

Verse 18, Rescue me. Redeem me. Verse 29, O God, protect me. Now he's not really in a tank of water drowning.

He is God's anointed king. He has enemies who are seeking to destroy him. They seek to overthrow his power. This is a mortal struggle of life and death and power.

[4 : 30] So in verse 4, Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head. Many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me.

I am forced to restore what I did not steal. And down in verse 10, Many people hate him and he's bewildered by it.

And he expresses the injustice of what he's experienced. He's hated without reason or cause. He's forced to restore things that he hasn't taken. They may have even tried to poison him.

Gaul is something which is really bitter or even poison itself. And they ridicule his religious piety. He fasts. He put on sackcloth. He comes before God. He humbles himself before God.

And they mock him for it. And it's really interesting. He doesn't try to say to God, I'm sinless. Why is this happening to me?

[5 : 49] He's quite forthright. And he says, You know my folly, O God. Verse 5. My guilt is not hidden from you. May those who hope in you not be disgraced because of me.

O Lord, the Lord Almighty, may those who seek you not be put to shame because of me. He's like a Christian believer.

You don't have to hide our sin and weakness from Christ. He sees it all and he has died for it. We are broken, imperfect, sinful people who have been redeemed by Christ.

And so if Christ has died for you, there's no hidden secret in your life which can bring you undone with him. It might cause you problems with people, but not with him.

But David sees something which is even bigger than his own personal suffering. He cares about those who hope in God. He cares about people who seek God. And he really cares that they won't in some way be disgraced or shamed because of his own behaviour.

[7 : 07] He cares about the harm which he as a Christian leader can do to God's people and to God's name. How we behave as a congregation here at St. Paul's has a bearing on how Christ is perceived in our community.

How we behave, any of us who have leadership, how we behave in our leadership bears on the name of Christ and how he's perceived in our community and our witness to him.

And David's saying, I'm not the perfect man and you know that, Lord. But in these things I am hated and accused without reason and it is killing me.

His integrity's intact. You don't have to be perfect to have integrity. Integrity owns weakness and failure. But integrity stands firm against lies and wickedness.

And even with integrity he is suffering. And David is actually experiencing what he refused to do to his predecessor Saul.

[8 : 30] He had the opportunity at least twice in his ministry in his life to take Saul's life. And he refused to do it. He would not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed.

Samuel had anointed David as the next king, yet David refused to take the kingship by force. For David that would have been an act against God himself. So to bring down the man that God had appointed would have been to strike out against God.

So in some ways the mocking of the king is with reason. Hatred of David is driven by hatred of the God who stands behind David's throne.

And it's hatred of the God whom David is devoted to. He was experiencing what Jesus would come along a thousand years later and teach.

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. So the circumstances of his life threaten to completely overwhelm him even to death.

[9 : 43] I imagine that's what happens inside people when they contemplate taking their own life. They lose hope.

They feel completely lost in their circumstances. They can see no way out by themselves and by their own efforts and so they give up.

But David does a wonderful thing. He's desperate but he doesn't give up. He cries out beyond himself. He's God's king but he doesn't beat around the bush. He dials triple O to God and he doesn't waste time getting around to the point of his need.

This whole song is directed to God. Save me, O God. And it's a humble thing to do. He's saying, I can't fix this. The circumstances of my life, they are unfair.

They are completely out of control. I am in great danger. I cannot do a thing about it. He is like a person coming to Christ for the very first time and he cries, save me, O God.

[10:50] And it should be no surprise that Jesus and the gospel writers apply this song to the circumstances of Jesus. So God's anointed king misunderstood and unknown in the world.

Jesus would suffer cruelly and unjustly at the hands of the people that he had made. In John chapter 7 verse 3, Jesus' brothers said to him, they said, You ought to leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples may see the miracles that you do.

Because no one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, go and show yourself to the world. For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

And it's an echo of Psalm 69 verse 8 which says, The Lord's anointed is a stranger to his brothers, an alien to his own mother's sons.

Or in John 2, Jesus comes into the temple at Jerusalem at Passover time. He makes a whip out of cords and gentle Jesus, meek and moe wreaks havoc as he drove everyone out of the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers.

[11:59] And John tells us that Jesus said, Get these out of here! How dare you turn my father's house into a market!

And his disciples remembered that it is written, Zeal for your house will consume me. So what John does a thousand years later is quote Psalm 69 verse 9 exactly to explain what was motivating Jesus.

He was concerned for God's name and he was concerned for God's glory. Matthew's gospel just describes Jesus' suffering on the cross. In Matthew 27 verse 33, They came to a place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull.

And there they offered Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. But after tasting it, he refused to drink it. So Matthew uses the language of Psalm 69 verse 21 to describe what happened with Jesus at the cross.

They put gall on my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst. So what you start to see is that Jesus is like David. His suffering is completely unjust.

[13:16] But he is unlike David in that he had no guilt or folly. David cries to God for salvation.

On the night before he died, Jesus cried out to God in the garden of Gethsemane. He said, Father, if possible, take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours be done.

He entrusts himself to his father's purposes. He goes and faces the hatred of men and women like us that he came to save. Hebrews chapter 5 says it like this.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. And he was heard because of his reverence of mission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. And once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

[14:26] The unjust suffering of Jesus was part of the amazing plan of God that has brought salvation to us. Now, knowing who is suffering in this psalm helps us to make sense of its most difficult verses, and that's from verse 22 down.

May the table set before them become a snare. May it become retribution and a trap. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see and their backs be bent forever.

Pour out your wrath on them. Let your fierce anger overtake them. May their place be deserted. Let there be no one to dwell in their tents. For they persecute those you wound, and they can talk about the pain of those you hurt.

Charge them with crime upon crime, and do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not listed with the righteous.

So the king calls down God's judgments on his enemies. And one way to hear this is something like vindictive retribution.

[15:42] You know Bruce Willis in a die-hard movie promising to get back and to get even. An angry outburst on your enemies. Something that fits really well with turn-or-burn preaching.

Give it to them, Lord. Trap them. Blind them. Wipe them off the face of the earth. Don't allow them to share in your salvation. Block them out of the book of life. That's what it says.

Try that down at Chatswood Mall this afternoon. Go down and start telling everybody that they're going to hell.

People would see us as aggressive, judgmental hypocrites with little love. Who are we to condemn people to hell? What makes us better than anybody else?

You can hear it all, can't you? And in a sense, they would be right. Who do we think we are?

Self-righteous frauds who exalt themselves over other people?

[16 : 53] People who show none of the grace which has been shown to us in Christ? Brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ, you have been brought from darkness to light, from death to life, from hate to love, from judgment to mercy.

And God does not allow us to remain haters of people. And the Apostle Paul himself was brought from being merciless to full of mercy.

He was a hater. So in Acts 9, it says that Paul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. And he went to the high priest and he asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, those who belonged to Christ, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

And by the time that God had finished working on him, he reflects on his own transformation. He says things like in 1 Timothy 1, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.

But for that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

[18 : 31] I think a better way to hear this passage, these verses, these difficult verses, is from the king's perspective.

God's king is the voice behind this song. The king has been given his role by God himself and people have hated him for it.

Jesus told a number of stories predicting this. The tenants on the farm who kill and abuse the messengers that the farm owner sends and finally sends his son and they say, let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours.

It's the Garden of Eden all over again. Given the opportunity, we have shown again and again that if we could get God out of our lives, we will even kill him.

And that, brothers and sisters, is injustice on a cosmic scale. And the Bible says it is driven by the forces of hell.

[19 : 49] And it means that any act of hatred or injustice that we have experienced pales in insignificance to what all of us have done with Christ.

God has been amazingly humble and patient in putting up with our hatred of him. But the Bible is very clear that he will act against our rejection and bring it to a final end.

Acts 17. Again, I said this last week. God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. And he has given proof of this to all people by raising him from the dead. The judgments in this psalm are an inconvenient truth. Eyes are darkened to God's truth. People will experience his anger. They will be charged for their crimes. They will miss out on salvation.

[21 : 04] Their names will be blotted out of the book of life. Make no mistake that God's patience must give way to justice.

And putting your head in the sand will not prevent or slow God's great day of judgment. And what a good thing.

In Revelation 6, verse 9, Jesus opens the fifth seal and I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

And they called out in a loud voice how long, sovereign Lord, holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood.

See, God will bring justice not just for his beloved but hated son. He will bring justice for everyone who has been hated because of Christ.

[22 : 09] If the world hates you bear in mind that it hated me first we will be vindicated.

And so it's good and right to long for God's day of judgment. Believers will be safe on it. We have been shown mercy and kindness from God that we could never deserve.

But we have no personal right to glory in the destruction of others. Because in God's economy anybody who goes to hell goes to the place where every single one of us deserves to go.

Fear of God's judgment was the jolt that brought me to him. And in that moment when he showed me how undeserving I was of special treatment from him that was the moment when I understood the mercy of Christ for the very first time in my life.

And I cried out to God for mercy. Save me, O God. The psalmist is hated. God's king is hated.

[23 : 27] The Lord Jesus Christ God himself was and is hated by some but there is safety for everyone who cries to him save me, O God.

So brothers and sisters don't walk away from this song grumbling against a God who sends people to hell who blots them out of his book of life.

See the nature of our hate of him. See the injustice of this world. See our extraordinary arrogance and wickedness.

Delight that injustice won't prevail. Rejoice that perfect justice will reign. Rejoice that the world in which children are killed in natural disasters and people do wicked things to one another will be brought to an end.

Marvel that God in his goodness has given us Christ. Praise him that on the great day of judgment we will receive mercy and kindness that we can never deserve.

[24 : 36] That every wrong in the world will be put right. See it's confidence in the justice of God that allows the hated king to finish Psalm 69 full of hope.

He can look beyond his present suffering and he can say there is more there is hope. Verse 30 people will praise God's name in song and they will glorify him with thanksgiving.

Verse 32 the poor will see and they will be glad. Verse 34 heaven and earth will praise him. And verse 36 children of his servants will inherit his holy city and those who love his name will dwell there.

Praise God for his justice. Praise God for his mercy. Please God help us to be generous in offering your mercy to others that they too might escape your perfect justice.

Amen.