

Lamenting Injustice: Appealing to God

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] It's great to be out here worshiping, sun shining on us, and I think it was Blue Jay or Common Grackle screaming. And for those of you who don't know me, if you're visiting, my name is Sean.

I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church. It's my joy to preach God's word to you this morning. We're going to be in Psalm 10, so please open up your Bibles to Psalm 10. If you don't have a Bible, I don't think we have hard copies to give you today, but you could look it up on your phones. You can get the BibleGateway.com or get one of the thousands of Bible apps out there.

I do highly recommend, if you are a believer and you regularly read the Bible, to use a physical Bible because it's nothing like, it doesn't capture, it's easier to see the pages when it's opened up in a book rather than having to scroll through it.

And I think I've had several encounters just from reading the Bible in public, had the opportunity to have gospel conversations, and Christians just being encouraged seeing someone reading the Bible in public and whatnot.

[1 : 06] And so I encourage you guys to do that. Much the same way we are publicly living out our faith and worshiping this morning. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word.

Father, we humble ourselves before you. Father, we humble ourselves before you.

What it looks like to live as Christians who lament in the midst of the injustices in this world.

Point us to Jesus and captivate our hearts again with the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. In our church, we usually rise for the reading of God's word as a way of honoring God and the word he has spoken to us and his authority.

So if you would please join me in standing. I will read Psalm 10 out loud for us. Amen. Why, O Lord, do you stand far away?

[2 : 54] Why, O Lord, do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In arrogance, the wicked hotly pursue the poor. Let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised.

For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord. In the pride of his face, the wicked does not seek him. All his thoughts are, there is no God.

His ways prosper at all times. Your judgments are on high, out of his sight. As for all his foes, he puffs at them. He says in his heart, I shall not be moved.

Throughout all generations, I shall not meet adversity. 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.

[3 : 56] He seizes the poor when he draws him into his net. The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. He says in his heart, God has forgotten.

He has hidden his face. He will never see it. Arise, O Lord, O God. Lift up your hand. Forget not the afflicted.

Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, you will not call to account? 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. Break the arm of the wicked and evildoer. Call his wickedness to account till you find none.

The Lord is king forever and ever. The nations perish from his land. O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted. You will strengthen their heart.

[4 : 54] You will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that men who is of the earth may strike terror no more. This is God's holy and authoritative word, and you may be seated at this time.

Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan's government, the Afghani people have suffered significant curtailment of their freedoms and a dramatic reduction in their standard of living.

According to the UN World Food Program, 95% of Afghans don't have enough food to eat. But you can't even peacefully protest against the Taliban government because peaceful protesters are arbitrarily arrested, tortured, and sometimes disappear.

The Taliban conducts extrajudicial executions, meaning that they kill people without due process. The oppression of Christians is particularly intense in Afghanistan, and any Christian convert is likely to be killed for their faith if discovered.

In the midst of such egregious injustice, where is God? During the transatlantic slave trade, spanning over 400 years, almost 13 million Africans were unjustly kidnapped and sold as slaves across the Atlantic Ocean.

[6 : 20] According to the U.S. State Department, more than 27 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking every single year. That's modern-day slavery of a staggering scale.

Unfortunately, however, many of those evildoers are never brought to legal justice. For those suffering men and women, even children, and to all those bereaved family members, where is justice?

Where is God? According to Open Doors USA, 360 million Christians throughout the world live amidst high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith.

Hundreds of millions of Christians face extreme persecution in countries like North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, India, Sudan.

Last year alone, 5,621 Christians were murdered for their faith. 2,110 churches were attacked. And 4,542 Christians were detained for their faith.

[7 : 30] These are Christians, children of God, who are unjustly treated all throughout the world. And when they cry out for justice, where is God?

The far less severe we experience various forms of injustice in our society too. Maybe you were unfairly overlooked for a job, or a promotion, or a certain wage level, or admission into some program because of a prejudicial system.

Maybe you were unfairly accused, or charged of a misdemeanor, or a crime that you never committed. In our sinful, broken world, sometimes it can feel like the system is rigged and weighted against you.

Where is God in all of this? In His first coming, Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save the world, as it says in John 3,17.

However, in His second coming, it says in 2 Timothy 4,1, that Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead. And at that time, all evildoers who refuse to repent and turn to Christ, all those who have not been saved by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, His death and resurrection, will be condemned and brought to justice.

[8 : 52] But we live right now in between those two comings of Jesus. Between two advents. And so in that intervening period, when we don't yet see the fullness of God's justice, and when that haunting question persists, where is God?

When we are torn between our faith, between faith in the just God and the reality of an unjust world, when injustice persists, despite many of us working toward justice in accordance with our vocations, how do we bridge that gap?

We lament, as the psalmist does in Psalm 10. Last two weeks, we focused on the first two steps of lament, turning to God and then groaning to Him.

And then today, we're focusing on the third step of lament, appealing to God to act, arousing Him to action. And we can appeal to God in the midst of affliction because He is the righteous judge to whom all are accountable.

And since we have some kids in the crowd today, I thought I could try to involve them. Kids, can you guys hear me? Inji, Pearl, Ine, Chloe, Constance. Can you guys hear me?

[10 : 04] So, I'm going to repeat this main point several times. When I say, when the wicked say, there is no God, we say, and then you guys could say this as loud as you want, arise, O God.

Can you guys say that? Arise, O God. Okay, adults can participate too if you want to. Yeah. So, when the wicked say, there is no God, we say, arise, O God.

All right. I also see that there's limited, shaded real estate here. So, if you're out in the sun, please feel free to sit close with other people. Everybody here, love each other. It's okay. You guys can get close. Yeah. If you stay in the sun, your complexion is going to be a lot closer to mine than yours probably by the end of this.

In verses 1 to 11, we face the reality that sometimes when our faith is clouded by the sin and darkness we see all around us, the evildoers claim that there is no God can sound convincing. So, the psalmist cries out in verse 1, Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In light of the injustices that he sees all around him, he feels as though God is aloof and detached from the troubles of our world.

[11:21] He feels as though God's abandoned him at the moment of his greatest need. The verse also speaks to our perception in the midst of suffering. Even for those of us who believe in God's robust sovereignty in and through our sufferings, it's still jarring when we actually are in the throes of pain.

In the book of Job, for example, the titular character faces all kinds of suffering that God sovereignly allows into his life and he is so destitute and so sick and desperate at some point that even his wife counsels him to just curse God and die.

But Job rebukes her in Job 2.10 and says, shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil? And that is precisely our sinful human tendency.

We only want to receive good from God and not evil. Subconsciously, many of us tend to believe the false narrative that if we're good Christians, only good things will happen to us.

We limit God's goodness to our own narrow perception of goodness. We can't fathom that God might be doing something deeper in and through even the evil that surrounds us.

[12:40] This is why God can feel so distant in the midst of our trials and sufferings. But God is not far away. God does not hide himself in times of trouble but he sure can feel that way.

The psalmist feels this way in particular because of the injustices he sees. And there are two main categories of people we see in this psalm, in Psalm 10. The first category is the wicked or the evildoer.

That word occurs five times throughout the psalm. They are the perpetrators of evil. They are described as the predators. The second category of people is most often referred to here as the poor or the afflicted, both of which translate the same Hebrew word that occurs five times in this psalm as well.

The poor are also called the helpless three times and also referred to as the fatherless and the oppressed. All these terms have in common the fact that these people are the prey.

They are vulnerable because of their social station, their poverty, and or their fatherlessness. They are vulnerable. And they have fallen into a series of unfortunate events.

[13:47] And now their vulnerable status makes them an easy prey for the wicked predators. And the poor do sometimes fall prey to the evil deeds of the wicked. It says in verse 10, the helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might.

And when you are downtrodden, often enough, it can feel like that's what always happens. That's what we see in verse 5. It says that the ways of the wicked prosper at all times.

It's hyperbolic to express the subjective feeling of the psalmist. The bad guys always win. I always get the short end of the stick.

Where are you, God? The greedy fleece the poor and enrich themselves. The violent ravage the weak. And the murderers kill the innocent with indemnity.

They do whatever it takes to achieve their own selfish ends. And they succeed sometimes without repercussions. When you feel this way, Psalm 10 is teaching us to continue, to keep crying out to God, to not give up on him, but to appeal to him to act.

[14:52] And having explained the status of the innocent poor, Psalm 10 insightfully tells us what the wicked are like too. It tells us three things primarily, what the wicked do, how they do it, and why they do it.

First, what do they do? It says in verse 1 that the wicked hotly pursue the poor and they devise schemes to catch the poor. They target the poor because they are vulnerable and make easy targets.

They trot on them for self-advantage and selfish gain. Of course, evildoers can and at times do target the rich and the powerful. But generally speaking, the weak and the poor are their prey of choice.

Pedophile abusers target orphans and kids that come from broken homes. Scammers target the elderly who are not proficient in the new internet age. Burglars target poorer homes that lack security features or ones that have already been burglarized because it makes them, they see that as successful targets.

And the wicked do their misdeeds not only with their hands but also with their mouths. It all says in verse 7 that the evildoer's mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression. Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

[16:03] They use words to manipulate, abuse, slander, deceive. So that's what they do. Second, how do they, do the wicked, do evil? Like a hunter, it says in verses 8 to 9 that the evildoer sits in ambush.

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 them into his net. This is speaking to the reality that the wicked don't do their evil deeds out in the open in full view of the public generally speaking.

There is still God's common grace at work in society and those sinful people's moral compasses often malfunction. People do still have a general sense of right and wrong. So evildoers need to hide their foul deeds.

So they use ambush hiding places. They lurk. They stealthily watch for the helpless and that's why they need to be exposed and uncovered. Now third, why do they do evil?

[17:05] Verse 3 tells us one theological explanation. For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord.

At the heart of wicked deeds is sinful desire and greed for gain. James 1, 14-15 is very clear about this dynamic of the human heart.

It says, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Inordinate desire desire that goes beyond the bounds that God has set. That desire is the conception and when that desire is incubated, nursed, and acted upon it gives birth to sin and when sin is fully grown eventually it brings forth death apart from repentance.

It leads to eternal death and separation from God. So what is at the root of all evils? According to the Bible it's not primarily our inhospitable environment or unfavorable circumstances or lack of education or guidance.

[18:18] Sure, those things can exacerbate but they are not the cause. Rather at the root the cause it's our desires, our sinful desires, our passions that are at war within us.

It says in James 4 1-2 we desire and do not have so we murder. We covet and cannot obtain so we fight and quarrel. That's the first reason why the wicked do evil. But there's another theological explanation.

A second reason even when the wicked have sinful inordinate desires if they had the fear of God they would be somewhat restrained in their evil deeds but they lack the fear of God.

So verses 2-3 tell us that they are arrogant and that they renounce the Lord. It says in verse 4 in the pride of his face the wicked does not seek God all his thoughts are there is no God.

So they do not believe that God sees what they do in secret. They think that as long as they can hide from human eyes they are in the clear. They think God's judgments are on high away far away somewhere out of his sight and so they don't pay any mind to it.

[19:26] It says in verse 5 that as for all his foes he puffs at them. The word puff is such a great translation because the Hebrew word for that is poo. It's like it's onomatopoeic it's a word that sounds like what it means.

So these guys these evildoers they poo-poo their enemies and poo-poo God's judgment and they think that they're going to escape divine justice. So the three quotes attributed to the wicked demonstrate their posture toward God.

First in verse 4 they say there is no God. When the wicked say there is no God we say I say no.

Alright I don't know if the kids are paying attention or not. First thing the wicked say is there is no God. Second in verse 6 they say I shall not be moved. Throughout all generations I shall not meet

adversity.

Third thing they say is in verse 11 God has forgotten. He has hidden his face he will never see it. The evildoers sense of self-assuredness comes from their atheism.

[20 : 34] Sure evildoers might claim to believe in God but even when they are theists theoretically they are atheists functionally. That's why in verse 11 they say God has forgotten.

They're acknowledging God in one sense but they don't think he will do anything. God is to them a toothless lion who either cannot or will not do anything to stop them or bring them to justice. In this sense all evildoers in the world are practical atheists because their evil deeds are abetted by the belief that there is no God. In 2016 there was a New York Times feature article entitled The Lawyer Who Became DuPont's Worst Nightmare.

If you guys have been talking to me about this some of you I've already shared this with you because I saw the movie Dark Waters with Bailey I think in Seattle when she was visiting my parents and the movie is based on that article it covers a story of how a lawyer named Robert Billett exposed a major chemical company called DuPont which for five decades dumped forever chemicals into the ground and to the water supply of several communities in West Virginia poisoning to various degree more than 100,000 people for five decades because DuPont chemists knew much more than the regulating agencies of the U.S. government at the time and so they largely hid the identity of these harmful forever chemicals PFOA also known as Teflon from them so that they wouldn't regulate it so they had conducted their own research over the decades so they knew that these chemicals were in the public water supply and in the community members bloodstreams they knew that these chemicals were killing people's livestock and wild animals who were eating off the ground and drinking the waters that they had poisoned they knew that these chemicals caused birth defects and that their pregnant employees were giving birth to a very high percentage of deformed babies but they still didn't tell them they knew that these chemicals were linked to kidney cancer testicular cancer and thyroid disease and high cholesterol preeclampsia and ulcerative colitis and yet knowingly they dumped 7,100 tons of PFOA-laced sludge out into open areas and when they found a less toxic viable alternative to the chemical in 1993 they decided not to replace it because they didn't want to jeopardize their 1 billion annual profit from their line of PFOA-coated products pretty much everything that is greaseproof waterproof stick-proof and stain-resistant like non-stick pans and Scotchgard and PFOA was only one of more than 60,000 synthetic chemicals that companies like DuPont produced and released into the world without regulatory oversight and thankfully

God used Robert Billett who is a Christian to expose DuPont's evil deeds and DuPont has already had to pay a total settlement value of over 753 million dollars for personal injuries that they cost and more is coming to light but for five decades they did their evil deeds stealthily in ambush in hiding places telling themselves there is no God I shall not be moved throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity God has forgotten he has hidden his face he will never see it that's the case for all evildoers maybe some of you are doing evil in secret but if you are sinning and perpetrating justice thinking that you will never be found out thinking that there is no God or that God will never see it then be warned because God is not blind and he is not deaf and he is not far away our God is the all seeing all knowing

[24 : 36] God he is attentive to the cries of his people and he is near he is the God who is with us Emmanuel and that brings me to my second point in verses 12 to 18 the psalmist answers the presumptuous boasting of the wicked with his declarations of faith so first the wicked said in verse 11 God is forgotten but the psalmist prays in verse 12 forget not the afflicted the wicked said in verse 11 God will never see it but the psalmist says in verse 14 you do see for you note mischief and vexation the wicked boasted of the desires of his soul in verse 3 and took advantage of the poor but the psalmist prays in verse 7 oh Lord you hear the desire of the afflicted the wicked believed in verse 5 that God's judgments are on high out of sight but the psalmist believes in verse 18 that God will do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed and there are two related words in Hebrew the wicked boasted in verse 13 that God will not call him to account but the psalmist declares in verse 15 that God will call his wickedness to account the wicked renounce God in their heart in verse 6 11 and 13 but the psalmist declares that the Lord strengthens the heart of the afflicted in verse 17 so point by point by point the psalmist counters the presumptuous boasting of the wicked when it was the wicked versus the poor the wicked won and trampled all over the poor but the psalmist declares that now the Lord

God himself will take up the cause of the poor because God cares about the cause of the innocent poor and if God cares about the cause the plight of the afflicted we as God's people also should care about the plight of the afflicted now I want you to know I'm going to qualify this because I'm not saying that you all need to be doing something about all of the injustices in this world there are tens of thousands of injustices in the world and Christians cannot possibly be doing something about every single one at least not every single one of us some of you will be in different things and that's okay that we can't do that because we're finite creatures and limited in our capacity but it's not okay to not care about the injustices of the world if we hear about various injustices of the world but they don't make us indignant and they don't break our hearts if we don't care about them that means we don't care about the things that God cares about and that's not okay if injustice in the world don't make us cry out arise oh Lord then we ourselves need to be aroused out of our apathy the psalmist is not aloof he's not disinterested he's gutted by the injustices that he sees all around him and so he appeals to God in verse 12 arise oh Lord oh God lift up your hand forget not the afflicted when the wicked say there is no God we say arise oh God when the righteous start to lose heart they begin to despair and say there is no God but we must not do that when God seems absent when we most need him we must not despair and say there is no God instead we turn to God when we appeal to him in faith we call upon him to act arise oh Lord this is a very common refrain in the lament psalms arise oh God arise oh Lord psalm 3 7 says arise oh Lord save me oh my God psalm 7 6 arise oh Lord in your anger lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies awake for me psalm 9 19 says arise oh Lord let not man prevail psalm 17 13 arise oh Lord confront him subdue him deliver my soul from the wicked psalm 74 22 arise oh God defend your cause psalm 82 8 arise oh God judge the earth the phrase arise oh Lord comes from numbers 10 34 to 36 when the Israelites were journeying in the wilderness and when they were facing enemies who were occupying the land of Canaan before anybody from the camp of Israel was set out it was the ark of God which represents the presence of God among his people because it stands for God's footstool the ark of God would be the first to rise and be taken up so it would lead the vanguard in the charge in battle and so it's really a battle cry so Moses would say arise oh Lord and let your enemies be scattered and let those who hate you flee before you so it's figurative of course because you know it's not like God is actually sitting or lying down and or asleep and needs to be aroused but it's a bold prayer calling God to act on our behalf God do something see how these evil doers revile you see how your people are oppressed rise up oh Lord stand up for us fight for us crying out to God for vengeance may not fit some of our politically correct sensibilities but I dare say that that's because we have not known true suffering to those who have been unjustly deprived by the wicked so that their children are starving but don't know where their next meal is coming from to those people who wake up in the morning wondering whether they'll be raped again that day to those who have been widowed and orphaned by the ravaging violence of the wicked it would be terribly callous to speak nonchalantly of a loving God who never punishes evildoers the people need these people need to hear of the God of wrath of the God of justice they need to hear the battle cry arise oh God because God's vengeance is an expression of God's love for the oppressed so the psalmist doesn't mince words he says in verses 14 to 15 that the Lord will take it into his hands to be the helper of the helpless and he prays to God break the arm of the wicked and evildoer call his wickedness to account till you find none notice that the psalmist does not try to take matters into his own hands he rather prays that God will take matters into his own hands and break the arm of the wicked that had seized the poor the strong hands of the Lord will break the seemingly strong hands of the wicked that's why Romans 12 19 it says beloved never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written vengeance is mine

[31 : 41] I will repay says the Lord the reason why Christians can have a non retaliatory personal ethic and turn the other cheek to those who slap them and forgive their enemies and love their enemies and be content not to avenge themselves the reason why we can follow that ethic that Jesus taught us is because we entrust ourselves to God of justice who will ultimately act and ultimately avenge and note that God hasn't yet done this this is why the psalmist is lamenting he's appealing to God to act but the basis for the psalmist faith that God will intervene is the Lord's kingship he says in verse 16 the Lord is king forever and ever even when dictators and warlords and pimps and slave traders are running rampant the Lord is still king and because the Lord is still king we appeal to him to act arise oh Lord everyone will be called to account the bill will come due for all those who do evil and this is good news for the innocent poor who are afflicted but what about

for the wicked is there any hope of mercy for the wicked what if we are the wicked who have lived as functional atheists living for ourselves and taking advantage of others as if

God will not do anything about it what if we are part of the problem part of the injustices of this world the times one sent out an inquiry to famous authors throughout the world asking them to answer the question what's wrong with the world today and G.K.

Chesterton an English author and philosopher and defender of the Christian faith reputedly responded with the simple short letter dear sir I am yours G.K.

Chesterton what is wrong with the world today I am injustice are in the world because we are sinful and because we are living in rebellion against God and this is precisely why God sent his only son Jesus Christ into the world to die on the cross for our sins the crucifixion of Jesus is the worst injustice ever committed by humanity because Jesus was the perfect son of God the holy one the righteous one unlike the rest of us he had never sinned and he was the infinitely worthy son of God his only begotten son and so his betrayal torture and murder are the most egregious acts of injustice ever perpetrated by mankind but through that seemingly senseless suffering and death Jesus paid for our sins and he satisfied God's just wrath towards sinners and he absorbed the full fury of divine vengeance upon himself so that the demands of God's justice may be satisfied so that even the wicked if we turn to him if we repent can be forgiven without compromising the justice of God and if the worst injustice in human history brought salvation then we can trust that even the injustices that we endure and we see will ultimately serve

God's good purposes in the end so let's keep appealing to him praying to him crying out to him arise oh lord arise oh lord let's pray together arise oh lord and act on behalf of the afflicted and the poor and help especially your children who are persecuted around the globe our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and help all believers who are enduring suffering of any kind to endure with hope and to never stop appealing and crying out to you to never lose faith that you are there and that you see and that you hear and that you act fill us with faith now to live in that way in

[36 : 43] Jesus name amen so and you and you