

## **The Oppressive Man**

Jesus in the Psalms

*Psalm 54*

Stuart W. Bryan

### **I. David and the Ziphites (1 Samuel 23)**

The lesson of our psalm is this: *When men set themselves against God and against His Christ, when they oppress the people of God unjustly, then it is our privilege to cry out to God for salvation and vindication, that He would deliver us from harm and destroy His enemies, so that we might give thanks and praise to His Name.*

### **II. The Oppressive Man**

#### **A. Prayer for Deliverance and Vindication (1-3)**

Nothing should be more precious to us in times of trouble than the nearness of our God. He is Immanuel, God with us. When we are afflicted unjustly, then we can cry out to Him.

#### **B. Declaration of Faith and Plea for Justice (4-5)**

Yahweh, the covenant keeping God, takes notice of injustice and will turn it around on the heads of those who practice it.

#### **C. Vow of Praise (6-7)**

David prays without doubting God's faithfulness. He knows that God will deliver him and so promises to praise the Name of the Lord.

### **III. Those Troubling Imprecations**

#### **A. A Broader Problem (cf. Ps 55:9,15; 56:7; 69:19-28; 109; Jer 18:18-23)**

Psalm 54 contains what is called an \_\_\_\_\_ – a prayer that invokes God's curse or judgment on certain people: "*Cut them off in Your truth*" (5b). How are we to deal with such prayers? Should we pray this way?

#### **B. Christian Opposition to Imprecations (cf. Mt 5:43-45)**

Many have concluded that these imprecatory prayers reflect a lower standard of ethics than that espoused by Christ. Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..." (Mt 5:43-44).*

On the basis of Jesus' words, C.S. Lewis speaks of the imprecatory psalms as "*devilish*" and "*diabolical*." He concludes that we "*should be wicked if we in any way condoned or approved [these prayers], or (worse still) used [them] to justify similar passions in ourselves.*"

### C. Cursing a Fig Tree (Mt 23:13-36; Mk 11:12-26; 1 Pet 2:19-24)

Does Jesus forbid the use of imprecatory prayers? No. He forbids bearing personal grudges and taking personal vengeance – things that were likewise forbidden in the OT (Lev 19:18).

After all, in Mark 11:22-26, Jesus teaches us to pray \_\_\_\_\_ upon God's enemies:

*22So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. 23For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. 24Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. 25And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

#### 1. Be Removed & Cast into the Sea

Jesus uses the destruction of the fig tree to teach the disciples how to bring down the \_\_\_\_\_ Mount (v. 23). Jesus is instructing them how to pray for the overthrow of those who hated God, His Christ, and His people. The one who prays for God's kingdom to come, "*must put all the opposition to this in one pile and say: 'Curses, maledictions and disgrace upon every other name and every other kingdom. May they be ruined and torn apart and may all their schemes and wisdom and plans run aground'*" (Luther).

**Here's the point:** The purpose of imprecatory prayers is to pray for the overthrow of all \_\_\_\_\_ that set themselves against the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

#### 2. Forgive anything you have against anyone (Jonah; Lk 9:51-56; Ro 12:17-21)

*Prayers of imprecation are not a license for personal revenge.* When we pray imprecatory prayers, we are praying for the expansion of *God's kingdom* and the overthrow of *God's enemies* not for the satisfaction of our *personal affronts* (cf. Lk 9:51-56). A proper use of the imprecatory prayers will always remember the purpose of Christ's Incarnation: to reconcile men to God. If we are truly concerned for the advancement of *God's kingdom*, then we will always remember that God often thwarts His enemies by converting them. So we pray that God destroy His enemies by converting them or judging them.

*We should pray that our enemies be converted and become our friends, and if not, that their doing and designing be bound to fail and have no success and that their persons perish rather than the Gospel and the kingdom of Christ [perish]. Thus the saintly martyr Anastasia, a wealthy, noble Roman matron, prayed against her husband, an idolatrous and terrible ravager of Christians, who had flung her into a horrible prison, in which she had to stay and die. There she lay and wrote to the saintly Chrysogonus diligently to pray for her husband that, if possible, he be converted and believe; but if not, that he be unable to carry out his plans and that he soon make an end of his ravaging. Thus she prayed him to death, for he went to war and did not return home. So we, too, pray for our angry enemies, not that God protect and strengthen them in their ways, as we pray for Christians, or that He help them, but that they be converted, if they can be; or, if they refuse, that God oppose them, stop them and end the game to their harm and misfortune.*

**Here's the point:** When prayed in faith, imprecatory prayers seek the expansion of \_\_\_\_\_ *kingdom* and the overthrow of *His enemies* not the satisfaction of *personal affronts*.

## IV. Conclusion