

God's Wrath Against Unjust Judges

Jesus in the Psalms

Psalm 58

Stuart W. Bryan

I. The Wrath of God (Jn 3:36; Ro 1:18; 3:26)

II. God's Wrath Against Unjust Judges

God's _____ is a central part of Christian preaching. Psalm 58 summons us to rejoice in *the wrath of God* against unjust judges. The psalm calls upon God to frustrate the designs of such judges and to destroy them so that the righteous may rejoice in His judgments and all men come to acknowledge Him as the Sovereign Lord.

A. Rebuking Unjust Judges (1-2)

¹Do you indeed speak righteousness, you silent ones? Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men? ²No, in heart you work wickedness; You weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth.

The title "*silent ones*" refers to royal rulers, _____, who should be *speaking* justly but who instead remain *silent*. As judges, they were to weigh out justice: "*Justice, and only justice, you shall follow...*" (Dt 16:20). With their sword, they were to defend the innocent. However, these judges tipped the scales toward *violence* (2b).



B. Describing Unjust Judges (3-5 cf. Mt 12:34; 23:33)

³The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. ⁴Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; They are like the deaf cobra that stops its ear, ⁵Which will not heed the voice of charmers, Charming ever so skillfully.

The judgments of these judges are inexcusable. They had a moral obligation to uphold and defend the truth, but they were *speaking lies*. They were acting like the serpent in the garden and, hence, were sons of the devil. *Poison* was in their mouths and rather than listen to pleas for justice, they *stopped their ears* like a perverse *cobra* that refused *to listen to its charmer* (5).



C. Appealing to the Just Judge (6-8)

⁶Break their teeth in their mouth, O God! Break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD! ⁷Let them flow away as waters which run continually; When he bends his bow, Let his arrows be as if cut in pieces. ⁸Let them be like a snail which melts away as it goes, Like a stillborn child of a woman, that they may not see the sun.

David uses six images to summon Yahweh, the covenant keeping God, to act so as to frustrate the plans of these unjust judges and to destroy them. It is far better that they die rather than justice disappear and still more suffer at their hands.



D. Rejoicing in the Just Judge (9-11)

⁹Before your pots can feel the burning thorns, He shall take them away as with a whirlwind, As in His living and burning wrath. ¹⁰The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked, ¹¹So that men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely He is God who judges in the earth."

Unjust judges will not endure – they shall face the _____ of God in this life and the next. God will vindicate the just. When He does, the righteous shall rejoice and revel in God's judgments. And when men behold God defending His people and upholding justice, they will be converted and worship the Judge of all the earth themselves.

III. Those Troubling Imprecations

A. The Challenge of Imprecatory Prayers (cf. Ps 55:9,15; 56:7; 69:19-28; 109; Jer 18:18-23)

Psalm 58 is an example of an _____ *psalm* – a psalm which invokes God’s judgment, God’s curse on certain people (vv. 6-8). David wants God to judge these unrighteous judges for their unjust actions. So here’s the question, “*Should we pray this way?*”

B. The Imprecations of our Lord (Mt 5:43-45; 23:13-36; 26:64; 1 Pet 2:19-24)

Does Jesus forbid the use of imprecatory psalms? No. The same Jesus who commanded us to love our enemies (Mt 5:43-45) also pronounced seven _____ upon the scribes and Pharisees, “*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...*” (Mt 23:13-36). These woes culminate in the following declaration:

³³*Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? ³⁴Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, ³⁵that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*

Jesus models this same opposition to injustice and this willingness to confront unjust judges in His own trial. When the high priest put Jesus under oath and demanded to know whether He was the Son of God, Jesus responded, “*It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Mt 26:64). Jesus’ response is a warning: to come *on the clouds of heaven* is to come in _____.

C. The Promise and Warning of Advent (cf. Ps 2; Is 42:1-4; Lk 2:34-35)

Advent means _____: the time of year we remember that our fathers awaited the fulfillment of God’s promises concerning the coming of the Messiah. Consider one of these promises from Isaiah:

¹*Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. ²He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. ³A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. ⁴He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law.” (Is 42:1-4)*

Jesus came in order that “*God might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Ro 3:26). He came to uphold and reveal the justice of God. Therefore, Jesus’ coming is both *good news* and *bad news*: “*Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*” (Lk 2:34-35). Those who repent and believe *rise*, while those who refuse *fall*. Thus Jesus reveals the hearts of men, including the hearts of earthly judges:

¹⁰*Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. ¹¹Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. ¹²Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.* (Ps 2:10-12)

The imprecatory psalms remind us that it is fitting for us to pray that God would thwart _____, that He would judge unjust judges, and that He would destroy them, if necessary, to accomplish this. Martin Luther explains how we should pray both for and against enemies of the Gospel.

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]... we... 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.

IV. Conclusion