

Psalm 109 - An Imprecatory Psalm

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Preacher: Alan Barts

[0:00] Awesome. Yep. That's what I'm talking about. Otis, I love you, man. As Jesse just said, my name is Alan, and I am one of the pastors here at One Harbor Church.

Just thank you so much for being here. It is a great honor and privilege that you chose to be with us today because there really are a lot of great churches in this area proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ every Sunday.

So thank you so much for being here. And as we continue working through the book of Psalms, I personally have enjoyed this series so much because it's teaching me how to bring the real me to the real God and the benefits of doing so.

I grew up in this area, the Bible Belt area, and I grew up learning how to dress the right way and talk the right way and put my little mask on on Sunday mornings, and it really led to a lot of unhealthy habits and those kind of things.

And so just being able to open up and be real with God is just freeing. And so I've really enjoyed it, and I hope it's been a benefit to you as well. The series is teaching us how to feel more deeply and to pray more honestly and regularly to help you and I see what God thinks about our deepest feelings.

[1:12] That's why this is so good for all of us. We live in a social media world where all you see others post is how great life is, how smart and good my kids are at everything.

My marriage is the best, which mine is. I love my job. My friends are the best ever, and we never have any family drama.

Right? I've never posted such things. I don't know anything about that. Today we're going to dig down deep in the emotional well of life. Today we're going to look at probably the most visceral and emotional passage of Scripture, not only in Psalms, but probably the whole Bible.

This is one of those passages that you may want to avoid because good church folks don't think or act like this. Right. It is an individual lament like we learned last week, but this week we are taking it to the nth degree kind of thing.

This psalm and a few others in this book are known as imprecatory psalms. It's just a big word that means a spoken curse, which I know none of you have ever done. However, this is a God-inspired passage written for us to learn how to handle our emotions, our real selves, if you will.

[2:32] A good friend of ours at this church, Alan Frow, said one thing about emotions. He said, feelings are a wonderful friend, but they're a horrible master. You know, I really don't feel like, you know, this is me sometimes, I really don't feel like going to work today or maybe even the next.

Heck, I probably will not feel like going to work the rest of the week, you know, maybe even the rest of the month. I don't know. My boss will understand. It's how I feel. That really matters, right? I'm sure I'll still have my job next month, right?

Now, just to provide some context, this psalm is written by David, one of the greatest heroes of the Bible, a man who went from being the youngest son of Jesse, who he considered to him to be worthless.

His own father considered him to be worthless, to become a great king of Israel, God's people. Scripture refers to David as a man after God's own heart, a man of great faith and courage.

This is the same David who as a young teenager killed a lion and a bear protecting his sheep, the same David that took out the mighty Philistine Goliath with a sling and shot in a stone. Truly he was a man of great faith and courage, and yet as we are getting ready to find out in this passage, he also was a man that experienced great persecution and torment that led him to speak some really unimaginable things about his adversaries.

[3 : 55] So today we're looking at Psalm 109. The scripture will be up behind me, and I'm going to read it. I feel like we need to read the whole script, the whole chapter. It's 31 verses, but it will really give you some great context in what we're looking at.

So Psalm 109 verse 1, to the choir master, a psalm of David. Be not silent, O God, of my praise, for wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking against me with lying tongues. They encircle me with words of hate and attack me without cause. In return for my love, they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. So they reward me evil for good and hatred for my love. Appoint a wicked man against him. Let an accuser stand at his right hand. We're just getting warmed up. When he is tried, let him come forth guilty.

Let his prayer be counted as sin. May his days be few. May another take his office. May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow.

[4 : 57] May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit. May the creditor seize all that he has. May strangers plunder the fruits of his toil.

Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children. May his posterity be cut off. May his name be blotted out in the second generation.

May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the Lord continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth.

For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted to put them to death. He loved to curse. Let curses come upon him.

He did not delight in blessing. May it be far from him. He clothed himself with cursing as his coat. May it soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones. May it be like a garment that he wraps around him, like a belt that he puts on every day.

[6 : 02] May this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord, of those who speak evil against my life. But you, O God, my Lord, deal on my behalf for your name's sake.

Because your steadfast love is good, deliver me, for I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me. I am gone like a shadow at evening. I am shaken off like a locust. My knees are weak through fasting.

My body has become gaunt with no fat. I am an object of scorn to my accusers. When they see me, they wag their heads. Help me, O Lord, my God. Save me according to your steadfast love.

Let them know that this is your hand. You, O Lord, have done it. Let them curse, but you will bless. They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad. May my accusers be clothed with dishonor.

May they be wrapped in their own shame as in a cloak. With my mouth, I will give great thanks to the Lord. I will praise him in the midst of the throne, for he stands at the right hand of the needy one to save him from those who condemn his soul to death.

[7 : 07] Whew. This is the word of God. It is a lot of words. It was a lot. Yeah, that's Philip's son.

Yeah. I love, I love how this song begins. To the choir master, you think, oh man, this is going to be a great song. So I just, when I was studying, I just imagined myself coming to any, any Sunday morning service and telling Philip, man, I wrote this new song that really speaks to my soul.

The lyrics are so real and powerful that I strongly believe this could change our church. Do you think we could try and sing it today? Can you imagine this being one of Caleb's Psalm of the Day? May your children be fatherless. May they wander and beg. May all of his future generations be wiped out and his possessions seized. This has been your Caleb Psalm of the Day.

Right? Trimper Longman, an Old Testament scholar, describes what's happening here. The enemy is cruel and calculating, and the psalmist describes himself as weak and without the resource to protect himself.

[8 : 18] Accordingly, he calls on God to save him by invoking a series of hard-hitting curses. We also see some courtroom language taking place here. We see he lays out his case for what he is feeling and experiencing.

He pleads to God to right what has been wronged. In his mind, he has done everything right. He's kind.

He's good. He's loving. He has even devoted himself to prayer. He is asking, literally begging God to be his arbitrator, to speak on his behalf and fix it.

So what we see, and even it might be missed at first is, it's okay to feel the need for vengeance. It's okay to feel the need for vengeance.

It's not okay to seek vengeance. Let me just clarify that. To literally go after someone because you have been wrong, that is not okay.

[9 : 21] But it's okay to feel like you need vengeance. We talked about these feelings of anger at the first of the year in our Words to Live By series, and we don't have time to revisit that now, but I would encourage you to go back and listen to those sermons on our app or our webpage.

The problem we face today is that this type of expression is not acceptable in today's society. Could you imagine this being your closing prayer during community group?

Pretty sure the attendance would dramatically drop off. But if we're honest with each other, and even ourselves, we really struggle to communicate these thoughts of anger and vengeance. These are just not what good Christians, or even people in general, think, or let alone verbalize.

Christian author Chip Dodd put it like this, anger is a warning signal telling us to look inside at what fear, hurt, sadness, or loneliness we are experiencing.

Anger gives us the opportunity to tell the truth about what is really going on inside our hearts. He is saying, it is okay to be real and honest with our emotions, to truly be authentic.

[10 : 32] This sounds easy, but how many of us really do this? We always try and put our best foot forward, especially in this setting. The lesson here is that we must stop being fake with God.

We must, above all else, learn to trust God for being the good father he is, and let it all hang out. The good, the bad, the ugly, even the never seen before.

The Bible has a lot to say about people getting what they deserve. David may seem way out of line here, but he knew the law. Any good Israelite knew the law, and he is appealing to a just God, to remember the laws he laid out, and make wrong things right again.

We see in Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy, 19, 16 through 21.

I'm, I'm special. My dad's right here. He just rolled his eyes at me. That's funny.

[11 : 42] Yep. Yep. So that book back in the Old Testament, 19, 16 through 21, if a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days.

The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and the rest shall hear and fear and shall never again commit any such evil among you.

Your eyes shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. That's pretty brutal. This is not an isolated passage of scripture.

We also see in Jeremiah some very similar language as he prays to God. In chapter 18, 19 through 23, Jeremiah says, Hear me, O Lord, and listen to the voice of my adversaries.

Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them. Therefore, deliver up their children to famine.

[12 : 58] Give them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence. Their youths be struck down by the sword in battle.

May a cry be heard from their houses when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them. For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet. Yet you, O Lord, know all their plotting to kill me.

Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you. Deal with them in the time of your anger. Also, some very strong language coming from Jeremiah that I honestly had never even thought of or looked at before.

These men feel the severity of their crime against them is only justified by severe punishment.

David, though, he takes it much farther. He's asking for too much vengeance.

However, the bigger picture that we see here is David is crying out to God. David is experiencing all of these really raw emotions to the absolute core of his being.

[14 : 04] And in the midst of this outpouring, he gives it back to God. Verse 4 says, In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. Verse 21 says, But you, O God, my Lord, deal on my behalf for your name's sake, because your steadfast love is good.

Deliver me. In verse 26, Help me, O Lord, my God, save me according to your steadfast love. What type, what this type of response to God leads us to know is that it's okay to feel it, but delivering vengeance is best left up to God.

Rather than calling out his buds and trying to open up a can of, whoop, there it is, David realizes that his biggest weapon against wrongdoings is bowing his knee and praying to God for vengeance. That's it. He fully and completely turns this over to God. And you know what? We should learn to do the same. Suppressing our feelings will work for a season, but at some point, an eruption will take place.

And when the dust settles, you and I will have created more pain and suffering, possibly even for future generations. Short-term thinking oftentimes leads to long-term regrets.

[15:26] I don't want to be that person, and I certainly don't want that for any of you here today. This song provides many reasons for why we should pray.

We see that God defends the defenseless and the needy. Verses 30 and 31, With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord. I will praise him in the midst of the throne, for he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death.

God is near to all those who are wronged. We also see a similar passage in the New Testament. James 5 and verse 4 says, Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

He hears those that are in need. He is with those who are in need. We also see that God is strong when I am weak. Back in Psalm 109, verses 22 through 25, we see, For I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me.

I am gone like a shadow at evening. I am shaken off like a locust. My knees are weak through fasting. My body has become gaunt with no fat. I am an object of scorn to my accusers. When they see me, they wag their heads.

[16:45] We see that God's love is unfailing. Another reason to pray for him. Verses 21, Because your steadfast love is good. Verse 26, According to your steadfast love.

He's never changing. God, you do this because you always love me. This love never changes. It never wavers. The beginning and the end of this psalm give us the best reason to pray to God with our deepest, innermost, and real selves.

God will do what is right because he is just. Verses 1 and 30, Be not silent, O God of my praise. With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord.

I will praise him in the midst of the throne. What the psalmist is doing here, he is giving praise to God. He is laying his case before God, but also admitting that God is God, and he is not.

He is actually exhibiting a great deal of faith. He lays out his case and then leaves it. He says, All right, God, this is what has happened to me, and this is what I think should happen, but you are a just God, and I'm going to trust you with all of it.

[18:02] You have it. That sounds really freeing to me, to take all of that burden and wait and say, God, you take it.

Because I know you are a good father that cares about justice and cannot be bribed. I give it to you, and whatever happens, it is the right thing.

Romans 12, verses 19 says, Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

Many of us know the Bible is one big story made up of many smaller stories. David had no idea what was coming down the road. He had no idea that Jesus, which is part of his lineage, would use this psalm to reckon what happens to him on the cross.

Jesus, the perfect spotless son of God, would stand beside the great accuser to make right what my sin, your sin, made so very wrong.

[19:10] If anyone had a right to curse his enemies, it would have been Jesus Christ. Jesus had every right to call down curses on his enemies. Trevor Longman again says, David's greater son, Jesus, found himself betrayed by his disciple, Judas.

He extended friendship and love to Judas, but Judas repaid him with deceit, and turned him over to the authorities who killed him. This is much worse than what happens to David.

Jesus is actually killed, and he was completely innocent. The psalms are quoted many times in the New Testament. Peter uses verse 8 of this psalm in the book of Acts.

Chapter 1, verse 20, it says, For it is written in the book of Psalms, May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it, and let another take his office. In fact, Judas gets a very similar end to what David's asked for.

We see just before this verse, in verse 18, Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out.

[20 : 17] So it would seem that Jesus is just like David in this passage, that all of his enemies are to suffer the vengeance of a holy God, a God who takes sin so seriously that he insists on justice.

We'd expect that, right? Like Judas, that there would be punishment for all the rest of those who delivered Jesus to be crucified. They persecuted him.

His disciples abandoned him. They slaughtered him. We'd be right to expect all of them to suffer. I would. They had been part of this too.

They too wagged their heads in disbelief and disgust when Jesus was hung upon the cross. This is not only in our psalm, but again in other places. Psalm 22, verses 6 and 8, But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

All who see me mock me. They make mouths at me. They wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, for he delights in him. This psalm points directly to Jesus, who was mocked for being the beloved son and saying he had come to save them.

[21 : 35] Listen to this account from Matthew, chapter 27, 39 and 40. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself.

If you are the son of God, come down from the cross. Jesus was hated. He was despised. He was mocked. He was mistreated. And he was murdered. Jesus received all the wishes of his enemy, even to death.

You think he called down the thunder and everything else in his power on all his enemies. The stage here is set for the biggest curse of all time. But maybe bigger, the curse of all curses.

But that's not what happens, is it? Listen to what Jesus prays. Jesus didn't scream out, Father, give them what they deserve. Luke 23 says, And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Jesus calls for forgiveness of his enemies instead of vengeance. He did the unthinkable. He did what is probably the most unnatural thing for us to do.

[22 : 47] Instead of saving himself, he died for them. Instead of the curse of all curses, we got the blessing of all blessings. And one harbor, it's not just David's and Jesus' enemies who were wrong.

It's easy to read this passage and think, at least I didn't do what that guy did. At least I didn't murder Jesus. I didn't do that. We're good at excusing ourselves. Sometimes too good.

Sometimes too quick. However, in that list, in Psalm 109, it isn't just about abusing the weak or hoping all their assets are seized and they become poor and desolate.

We see things like withholding kindness also makes the list, which is something we've probably all done. I have.

Ask Shelly. She'll tell you all about it. We're often good at reading these lists, skimming through them quickly, like, man, that's dark.

[23 : 52] That's not me. Assuming that we're off the hook and it's our enemies who are the guilty ones. But we get passages like James 4, 17, it says, so whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him, it is sin.

Come on. Come on. All of us stand guilty as charged before a holy God. All of us.

A God who would have been within his rights to blot us out, to unleash hell against us, but he didn't. We are those who have received grace and mercy.

And that, my friends, should change us. Prayer is honest and real. And when we bring those feelings to God, we are met with compassion.

It does something to us. It does something to my heart. Verse 4, in return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. Let anger or angry prayers for vengeance allow your heart to align with Jesus.

[25 : 01] If you've ever been lied on, betrayed, cheated, and slandered, what was the first thing that came to your mind after you processed the offense? Did you think, although that person just betrayed me, I will forgive them?

Or did your mind go to, I cannot believe that so-and-so betrayed me like that? Well, two can play that game. If your mind went to forgiveness, it speaks to your spiritual maturity in Christ. However, if your mind went to getting even or getting revenge, then that response also speaks to our maturity in Christ. You see, those initial responses that we have in our hearts, even if we do not immediately act on them, gives a glimpse of what is truly on the inside of us. If you want to get a good understanding of someone's relationship with Christ, listen to them talk long enough about a hurtful situation or what their response is to being offended. It is during the times of offense that what is in our hearts will come to the surface. When that day comes, when you and I are offended, it will be revealed to you how closely your spirit is aligned with God's.

[26 : 19] If you find that you are one that will not allow someone to call you out, but will engage them and give to them what they are giving to you, consider your spirit. If you are the one that teaches your children to hit back so that they will not be considered a weakling, consider your spirit.

That's a good one for me. I am quick to stand up for my kids. And this one right here calls me out on, she's like, what are you thinking? What are you teaching them? Pastor?

Boom. Boom. I'm like, all right. Sorry, son. I was wrong. I say to you, it takes more courage to walk away than it does to give someone a beat down.

If you are one that when you have been wrong, you sit around and think about scenarios where you can get even or prove to others the truth about the other person, consider your spirit. If you are quick to retaliate and slow to forgive and walk away, consider your spirit as I have had to do many times.

In all situations, I can choose to walk with God or I can choose to follow my flesh, especially when it is convenient for me. Those choices and their consequences belong to me.

[27 : 40] Revenge is not ours to take. Matthew 5, 43, through 45 says, you have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

That's what Jesus did. He prayed for us. Jesus says, be like me. Pray honestly. Be real, but pray for mercy.

Why? Why pray for those who attack us? Well, simply put, we don't want to get in a situation where we're asking for those who deserve punishment and judgment to get it. Because guess what? That includes you and me. We would be on that list. We're guilty. You see, it's because of Jesus that we aren't getting what we deserve.

He got that punishment. So that helps us to extend mercy in our lives and in our prayers. We can feel these feelings and pray these feelings. Absolutely. But we can't stop there.

[28 : 42] We are the people who call down curses on our enemies. Romans 12, 14 says, bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. We are a forgiven people, freed from the curses of death and sin.

Tim Keller put it really good, as he often does. God of justice, I am thankful that you hear even our angry cries. Yet I need your strong help when I make them.

Save me from letting my concern for justice devour my love and desire to see my opponents change and thrive. Let this be true in my politics as well as in my personal relationships.

Amen. As the band comes up, how do we respond? Where do we land? I think we continue to look to Jesus.

We look to the one who had every right to enact vengeance, but instead chose love and compassion. In the psalm, the psalmist says that God stands at the right hand of the needy.

[29 : 48] In ancient courts, that's where the accuser would stand. Is God there to accuse us? No. No.

Not for those who have put their faith in Jesus. for them, Jesus becomes our legal advocate to the judge, God the Father. 1 John 2 says, My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, the payment for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Amen. Jesus is at our right hand. And that should have meant an irrefutable witness to our sins and a definitive sentence to damnation.

That's what it should have meant. But he's come to become our advocate. Jesus, the righteous, is the propitiation for our sins.

[30 : 51] He stands between us and the wrath of God. And not just for ours, but for the whole world. To all who would call upon his name, Jesus, I deserve hell, but I don't want what I deserve.

The Bible's clear that we will get what we deserve unless we call upon the name of the Lord. And for all those who have called upon that name, we can share this morning a meal of remembrance.

If you would, take out your communion cups. Get out that delicious little wafer.

And the juice. Just for clarification's sake, there may be some in the room that are struggling with substance abuse, alcoholism. This is juice. I'm serious.

I'm very serious. In 1 Corinthians 11, we see, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, broke the bread, and said, this is my body, which is for you.

[32 : 01] Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also, he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

Take some time to consider what Jesus has done for you, where he has brought you, maybe where you are right now. He is the great advocate.

Don't forget that. He's standing right beside you and me right now, right to my right, your right. And it's speaking to God the Father on our behalf. Lord, as we come to take this communion today, God, I pray that we would just remember how good you are.

how good it is that we can be absolutely 1,000% real, that we can have thoughts that are just unimaginable about people who have wronged us.

And we may be just in thinking those things, but God, help us to be a people who bring those things to you, who boldly proclaim those things to you and then give it to you, to lay it at your feet and say, God, you are a good father.

[33 : 07] You love me. You care for me. You die for me. You take this burden. You do what is right and just, and I'm okay with that. Help us to be that people, Lord.

And for those of us in the room and listening who may not know you as Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, Lord, I pray that you would just call them to you, Lord, that you would let them know that through you there is hope, not only for today, but for all of eternity.

Just thankful for who you are, God. Thankful that you willingly came, lived a perfect life, died a horrific death.

You have been raised from the dead and you are now in heaven advocating for me, advocating for all of us. Thank you for these things, God, in your name we pray.

Amen. Amen.