**The Lord, the weak, and the wicked** 12/6/22 dkm

Read: Psalm 10, James 3

Text: Psalm 10

Psalms: 5:1-7, 12, 34:15-22, 72old

Some people in Ukraine are crying to the Lord, ‘Why, O Lord, are we being persecuted and killed by these wicked invaders?’ We cry out with them, and with people in other nations who are being persecuted, imprisoned and even killed by their own leaders, or by criminals in the neighbourhood. We are not the first generation to cry to the Lord for justice. Our parents cried out during WW2, and the psalmist makes the same cry of, ‘Why do the wicked get away with their wickedness and seemingly escape the justice of God’? Many say that the wicked in this Psalm are within Israel, but how then do we explain the word ‘nations’ in verse 16? Not by saying this word ‘nations’ refers to the wicked in Israel I hope! David faced wicked oppressors from both within and without.

The very first Psalm sets up a contrast between the righteous and the wicked because this is what God sees in his creation. He does not look to differences of gender or skin colour, or job descriptions or bank balances. God sees and knows the heart and the ways of every person, and will judge accordingly- godly or ungodly, righteous or wicked. But when? This is the question raised by this psalmist and by everyone who is oppressed by wicked people. The question of who is righteous, and how we become righteous, is the subject of the NT and the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 3). Here in the OT, the righteous fear God and delight in God’s law (Ps 1). The righteous are often poor and needy, like widows and orphans. As such they are oppressed by the wicked, who are often but not always rich; they are always proud and arrogant people who don’t fear God.

Psalm 10 is often seen as a continuation of Psalm 9 because it has no title and because it is a single Psalm in the Septuagint. Both contain the cry of the oppressed, ‘Arise, O Lord!’ This psalm gives us a detailed description of the wicked, which can we can use as a mirror or as glasses as the case may be. We do not have to go all the way to the Kremlin to find a wicked man! Ultimately, ‘vengeance belongs to the Lord, and God will judge the wicked, but we are called to remind them of God’s judgment, and of the way of salvation open to them through repentance and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ’.

**1. No action by God**

The cry, ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me’ in Psalm 22 is well known because Jesus took these words as he hung on the cross. In that Psalm, David is praying for help but the Lord seems not to be hearing him. He makes the same cry here in Psalm 10; the Lord is not coming to help him in his time of need. He needed help because wicked men were persecuting him in his weakness.

No historical context is given, but David was persecuted by Saul before he became king, and was later persecuted by his own son, as well as external enemies like the Philistines. In all this persecution, he did not resort to personal vengeance but cried to the Lord. His cry was that the Lord act and cause them to be caught in the pit they dug for him, or in the net they spread for him (10:2, 9:15).

**2. No thought of God**

Wickedness began in the Garden of Eden. Eve was tempted to disobey God’s word and set herself up as judge of what was good and evil- in other words, to be like God. That was a long time ago but in Adam and Eve, our first parents, we all sinned. We are all born with proud and selfish hearts which tell us we know better than anyone else, even God. Admitting this and delighting in God’s holy law is the beginning of righteousness, but the wicked, who are the focus of this Psalm and of God’s judgment, do not acknowledge God and do not admit their sin.

The wicked go on in the ways of Satan their father, in arrogant boasting and praising of what is wicked. God has no place in their thoughts as they focus on the newspaper, the TV, or Twitter to avoid reading the Bible. They mow the lawn, play sport, or just sleep in in order to avoid church. In our society it become quite easy to avoid any thought of God, and hence quite common to do so.

In putting the almighty God out of his thoughts, the wicked welcomes another god, namely money or possessions. Prosperity and abundance of worldly possessions becomes his god. He or she believes money will solve all their problems; but ‘money can’t buy you love’ and it can’t save you from death either. The wicked says in his heart, ‘I shall not be moved’ and ‘nothing bad will ever happen to me’ (10:6). Just listen to the person who hears they have cancer: ‘I never thought this would happen to me’ they say and, ‘I will fight and beat this’.

They give no thought to God who gave them life and who foreordains all that comes to pass. They give no thought to death and the judgment of God, when death is obvious to all and divine judgment a clear warning in the Bible: ‘After death comes the judgment’ and, ‘We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ’ (Heb 9:27, 2Cor 5:10). Not talking or thinking about death does not change the reality. Not talking about God or thinking about the judgment does not change this truth either!

When riches are your goal, corruption and oppression are just around the corner. James condemns the rich for failing to pay their workers (Ja 5:4). David makes special mention of the wicked person’s readiness to deceive and oppress, as well as curse (10:7). James devotes a whole chapter to the cursing tongue. Words can be more deadly than words. Lies and deceit can lead to great harm, but the wicked cares only about himself.

The wicked spend a lot of time planning how they can get more money and more power. They also spend a lot of time plotting revenge on anyone who they think is thwarting their plans. If their plans fail, they blame someone else, be it their spouse, their friend, the government or God. David likens the wicked to a lion waiting in secret to devour the innocent and the helpless (10:8-10). The helpless may well be widows and orphans, the very people that God helps (10:14).

How many consider gambling as harming other people. Pensioners do not have to gamble of course, but they do, and the person who wins the lottery takes their money! The youth with a knife, the burglar, or the exploiting businessman, may similarly rob the weak. We speak about ‘white collar crime’ but do not consider this as serious as street crime. Let us not fail to understand that God sees and knows all the ways of all the wicked, and will require an account from all. For the wicked to conclude that God has forgotten, or does not see, is to make a fatal mistake (10:11). God’s judgment may be delayed, but it cannot be avoided.

**3. Not forget the humble!**

The wicked are mistaken in thinking God neither sees nor knows, or that he lacks the power to judge. The weak and oppressed must not make the same mistake either. We must keep crying out to God, ‘Arise, O Lord! O God, lift up your hand’ and, ‘Break the arm of the wicked’ (10:12, 15). The children of Israel were terribly oppressed in Egypt; they cried to the Lord for mercy and, with great power, he delivered them. Many times God heard the cry of his people and came to deliver them from their enemies. Sometimes he delayed his coming until the people truly repented. A humble and a contrite heart the Lord will not despise (Ps 51:17).

Even as David cries to the Lord to arise and act on his behalf, he reminds us of another fatal mistake made by the wicked when they say of God, ‘You will not require an account’ (10:13). God is good and does good. God is just and ‘does justice’. It is amazing how the wicked are always ready to judge others but reject any idea that they themselves will be judged; blindness is a feature of wickedness. To think that you will never be called to account by the Lord is utter blindness and utter foolishness. To live in a world without ultimate justice is unbearable. The apostle Paul writes of being, ‘Without God and without hope in the world’ (Eph 2:12). The wicked might think that by killing themselves they will escape ultimate judgment, but this is just another lie they tell themselves.

**4. No mistake- God sees and judges**

As with most lament Psalms, Psalms pleading with the Lord for help and deliverance, this Psalm ends with the psalmist being reminded of God’s grace and power, and of how he has shown his grace and power in the past. It is as if he opens his Bible and reads God’s revelation of himself and his promises. God’s power is seen in the creation, but his mercy and his justice are only seen in the Bible, what we call his special or propositional revelation.

David reminds himself, ‘But you [God] have seen’ and you will repay (10:14). Verse 14 and 15 have been called, ‘A confession of trust in the Lord’s final judgment’. God does see, he sees everything, even into our hearts. He hears every word we say. He also sees our grief, and hears our prayers, of course. God makes a covenant with his chosen ones. A covenant involves commitment. The helpless commits himself to God, and God graciously commits to helping the helpless and the fatherless (10:14, Ps 37:5). The Lord commits himself to all who look to him, and trust that he is gracious and powerful to help. He promises, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’ (Heb 13:5). I recall quoting this verse to a Christian villager when Hindu neighbour were throwing stones on the roof of her house.

The call to break the arm of the wicked in verse 15 seems a bit brutal, but this is about destroying the power of the wicked. God does whatever it takes to stop the wicked persecuting helpless widows and orphans. The NIV translates the second part of verse 15 as, ‘Call him to account for his wickedness’, reminding us again of God requiring an accounting from everyone (10:13).

**5. No more oppression of the weak**

Our Lord Jesus Christ was persecuted by wicked men more than any other person. He had the power to save himself but he endured the cross for our salvation. Moreover, he left us an example in that he did not revile when reviled, and did not threaten when persecuted, ‘but committed himself to Him who judges justly’ (1Peter 2:23). The prayer of this Psalm ends with the assurance that, ‘The Lord is King forever’ and, ‘The nations have perished out of His land’ (10:16). This assurance is such that David speaks of God as having already judged the wicked. Reference to ‘the nations’ reminds us that God’s judgment extends to all nations and to the ends of the earth. Judgment begins in the house of God but does not end there (1Peter 4:17).

Having called upon the Lord not to forget the humble but arise and help them, David now says that the Lord had heard the desire of the humble (10:17). Let there be no doubt that what God promises he will do. We can take his promises as already fulfilled. We may not see immediate judgment but we press on, knowing that he has appointed a day when he will judge the world in righteousness by the man he has ordained (Acts 17:31). We proclaim this truth even as we see the wicked prospering, and helpless people suffering (Ps 37, 73). The day of divine accounting is coming, the day when all oppression will cease and the humble will be vindicated.