

The Magistrate's Psalm (Psalm 101)

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Mercy and judgement are my song;
And since they both to You belong,
My gracious God, my righteous King,
To You my songs and vows I bring.

If I am raised to bear the sword,
I'll take my counsels from Your Word;
Your justice and Your heav'nly grace;
Shall be the pattern of my ways.

No sons of slander, rage, and strife;
Shall be compan'ons of my life;
The haughty look, the heart of pride,
Within my doors shall ne'er abide.

Let wisdom all my actions guide,
And let my God with me reside;
No wicked thing shall dwell with me,
Which may provoke Your jealousy.

In vain shall sinners hope to rise
By flattering or malicious lies:
Nor, while the innocent I guard,
The bold offenders e'er be spar'd.

The impious crew (that factious band)
Shall hide their heads, or quit the land;
And all that break the public rest,
Where I have pow'r, shall be suppress.

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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

How Do We Respond to Evil?

Jon Pratt

This past Sunday morning a mob of anti-ICE demonstrators disrupted the worship service at Cities Church in St. Paul. Pastor Jonathan Parnell was forced to halt his sermon while the rioters screamed at and harassed the worshipers (which included children) while marching around the sanctuary chanting vile protests.

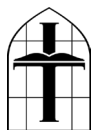
When I was first informed of this event and watched the videos recorded by eyewitnesses, my first response was anger. How could something like this happen in a church? How could this happen in the United States? How could this happen right here in Minnesota, mere miles from where I worshiped that morning? This is the sort of thing that happens in lawless third world countries where the freedom to worship is not constitutionally guaranteed as it is here.

But righteous anger of this sort should not be the only way Bible-believing Christians respond to evil acts perpetrated by wicked men and women. Scripture gives us many examples of how righteous sufferers ought to act when experiencing unjust attacks.

For example, in Acts 4 the religious and political leaders in Jerusalem sought to wreak havoc in the newly formed church by arresting Peter and John. After they were released with the threat of further punishment should they continue preaching, the apostles joined other believers, and they prayed (Acts 4:24–30). Their prayer acknowledged the sovereign hand of God in all that had taken place, both in the crucifixion of Jesus and in their arrest (4:28). And they also asked, “Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness” (4:29).

Like the early Christians, King David suffered at the hands of unjust oppressors, and many of his meditations on the subject of unjust suffering are found in the Psalter. Psalm 35 provides a helpful blueprint for us, demonstrating how we should act when and if evil people attack worship services in the church we attend.

David models two actions for us as we wait for God's delivering help: prayer and praise. First, we should pray like David, and he makes three



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kinds of petitions: 1) **imprecations** asking God to correct injustice (vv. 4–8, 19, 25–26); 2) **direct requests** for deliverance (vv. 1–3, 17, 22–24); and 3) **laments** (vv. 7, 11–16, 20–21).

Some Christians might wonder whether we should pray imprecations in this church age. After all, how can it be right to pray for the destruction and doom of others (e.g., Ps 58:6–8; 69:28; 137:8–9), especially in light of verses like Matthew 5:44 (“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”) and Romans 12:14 (“Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not”)?

Regarding imprecations we should understand the covenantal basis of these prayers in that Israel was a theocracy and David was God’s human regent so that an attack on David was an attack on God. Furthermore, we should recognize that David had a Godward orientation in his prayer in that he recognizes that God is the avenger of evil and that the prayers are grounded in the desire that God uphold the right and destroy the wrong (David is theologically rather than politically motivated). So since there is no theocracy today, can NT believers make imprecations?

Yes. While praying in this way, we should remember whom God has ordained to punish evil—civil government. Thus, we pray that our leaders will give us protection, maintain justice, and punish wrongdoers (Rom 13:1–4). Indeed, we can pray and should pray as Paul did in 2 Timothy 4:14: “Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.”

Several have suggested ways we can be making direct petitions to God (Denny Burk and Joe Rigney) and I draw here from their good suggestions: a) pray that Cities Church and all our Minnesota churches will be able to lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity (1 Tim 2:2); b) pray that our governing authorities both locally and nationally will do their God-ordained job of being a terror to evildoers (Rom 13:3–4); c) pray that this justice will be executed speedily (Eccl 8:11) who have clearly violated the FACE Act which prohibits protesters from disrupting church services; d) pray that the local authorities and politicians in Minnesota would not call evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20); e) pray that the protesters would repent so that they don’t have to suffer the eternal and unrelenting wrath of God in hell (2 Thess 1:6–8); and f) pray that God would use this persecution to build His church against which the gates of hell can never prevail (Matt 16:18).

David also models lament in Psalm 35, and we, too, should bring our laments to God in the midst of suffering. As Mark Vroegop in *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* has explained, lament is the confused cry of one who perceives that God’s presence is absent. These laments, which are found in numerous psalms, include a description of the suffering experienced by the psalmist, the sense of the absence of God in the suffering, and the overpowering na-

ture of the enemy. As we consider the great difficulties experienced in these past few days, we lament, “How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their destruction, my precious life from the lions!” (35:17). We lament because we know that only God can meet the needs of the sufferer (35:10 – “O Lord, who is like you, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him?”), only God knows the truth of all that has happened in this situation (35:22 – “You have seen, O Lord; be not silent!”), and only God is righteous and will judge justly (35:24 – “Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your righteousness, and let them not rejoice over me.”).

The second way Christians should respond to suffering is praise. We should pray as David did, anticipating the Lord’s deliverance (35:9–10). We should also expect to praise God in the midst of the congregation (35:18), realizing the value of corporate voices bringing praise to God. Finally, David plans to receive God’s vindication just as we should: “Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long” (35:28). One of the best ways we thwart Satan’s attempts to create chaos is to keep gathering in our churches for the express purpose of bringing praise and worship to our great God who still sits on His throne.

I encourage every reader to respond just as David did when he was attacked: come boldly to the throne of grace with your imprecations, direct petitions, and laments; and bring the sacrifice of praise to God both individually and corporately. May God give His church courage to stand firmly on the truth even as Satan and his minions seek in vain to thwart it.



This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
