



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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June 5, 2020

Dear Saints of God in Christ,

This seems to be the worst year in recent memory, doesn't it? It began with wildfires in Australia, and we're still in the midst of a public health *and* economic crisis. Last week, the nation in which we live was horrified by the actions of a few (now former) police officers up north. And this week we are horrified by the widespread looting and rioting that is compounding the economic hardship and perhaps even exacerbating the public health trouble.

If you're like me, you're perplexed by it all and not sure how to pray exactly. As more information becomes available, the situation just becomes more complex. It is increasingly clear to me that I simply don't have enough information to pray one way or another for every aspect of this crisis.

And the reason for this inability is I am human; God has not given me omniscience to understand everything comprehensively. Social media and 24-hour news channels dupe us into thinking we can understand a situation perfectly and completely and therefore we deceive ourselves into thinking we know exactly what should be done to fix it. But we simply cannot. And all this is frustrating especially when we try to pray to God in such a perplexing situation.

God knows our weaknesses, ignorance, and limitations. For that reason, He has given us psalms - prayers - to offer to Him in such seasons of sorrow because of injustice and violence, heartache and brutality. Some theologians have argued that Christians should not sing or pray these psalms, which are called "psalms of imprecation" (imprecation means *spoken curse*), but I strongly disagree. These are words God has given to His people for occasions such as this. And when we pray and desire the words God has already given to us, we can be certain we are not sinning in our prayers or our desires. Psalm 94 is one such psalm.

O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve! O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? They pour out their arrogant words; all the evildoers boast...they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive." (Psalm 94:1-7)

One of the things I love about the opening verses of this psalm is it is not political at all. It takes no sides except God's side, and it doesn't require us to take sides, but requires us to rest in God's justice and vengeance. I, myself, am grieved by the way George Floyd died, but I'm also very distressed at the sight of American soldiers firing at people sitting on their porches peacefully or police arresting journalists, but at the same time I'm also outraged that so many of the protests have resulted in the brutal deaths of and injuries to both police officers and bystanders.

This psalm is written for someone like me who can't really pick a "side," in all of this. Instead, it offers us words to pray to God that He would bring justice and vengeance upon the arrogant, wicked, and godless. God alone can bring justice, which is an important reminder for all of us now.

The news media and social media would have us believe that justice can come through the enactment of laws, revision of police procedure manuals, and the court system. But ultimately any measure of justice brought merely by those means will be imperfect and incomplete. Our hope for justice comes from God. So as we pray for His vengeance, we're also praying that He would use

every means to bring justice, whether before the Great White Throne at the End of Time or sooner via the new laws, revised manuals, or the Republic's judicial system.

Understand, O dullest of the people! Fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke? He who teaches man knowledge – the LORD – knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath. (Psalm 94:8–11)

The psalm continues with an evangelical focus. It bluntly confronts the wicked with the truth about God that they have neglected in their proud boasting and arrogant actions. Although looters, shooters, and killers may escape punishment momentarily or indefinitely in this life, the God who made the eye and ear is fully aware of what they have done. So the psalmist holds up God's certain justice as a reason for the wicked to forsake his way and turn to God. In this we are reminded that even when we are praying for God to avenge, we should also be bold to pray for the conversion of evildoers. Only where hearts are changed and born again can we escape the cycle of oppression, anger, and violence.

Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law, to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked. For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage; for justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it. (Psalm 94:12–15)

The middle verses of the psalm become increasingly hopeful as the psalmist reflects on how the discipline of God - even through injustice - can work holiness in His own people. But the psalmist looks higher because of the knowledge that God not only will never forsake His people, but also grant His people rest from every trouble.

The psalm encourages the oppressed, sorrowful, and grieving saints to take refuge in God, His steadfast love, and the certainty of His righteous reign being manifested fully in God's time.

But the LORD has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge. He will bring back on them their iniquity and wipe them out for their wickedness; the LORD our God will wipe them out. (Psalm 94:22–23)

The final verses of the psalm offer assurance to God's people that one day God will completely destroy all evildoers from the face of the earth. This is both cause for great hope as well as great gratitude. When we are honest with ourselves, we are reminded that if God brought our iniquity back on us or wiped us out for our own wickedness, we would do little better than those who have caused us to pray in this way.

That is perhaps most important of all to remember: we ourselves are unjust and sinners who have been saved by God's unmerited grace in Christ. For that reason, humility should characterize our response to crises such as this. Certainly we can be outraged, but in our outrage, we should speak, pray, and act with grace and humility, because of what God has given to us out of His mercy.

Your friend,



Ryan Biese,
Pastor