
Prayers

To God

Praise the Lord for His guidance. Praise Him for His guidance on the past and the presence, and ask Him to reveal where you should be going in the future.

For myself

After reflecting on God (above) think about the direction in which your life is heading and ask the Lord whether this is right, or if it should perhaps change.

For others

Weekly theme: Child abuse

Lord God Almighty, words cannot describe the awfulness of sexual abuse, which is found within every culture and society. The prevalence of this sin faces us with the evidence of the devil's work, and his ability to twist people's hearts to perform devious and aggressive evils which pervert everything we mean by 'love'. Make us vigilant against all sexual sin and deviation, firstly in our own lives and then in others, so that we protect the vulnerable from such dire manipulation and life-changing devastation. May we all acknowledge that we stand responsible before God for what we see and know, as well as those things to which we 'turn a blind eye'. May we all deal properly with 'safeguarding' issues concerning sexual abuse, and witness to the world that Christ is the true Shepherd of all who suffer its horrors. **AMEN**

Meditation

When change is all around you,
think of Jesus, for He has changed the most.
His song is sung from life to death,
and back again from death to life, encircling all,
but bringing all who will to God's triumphant end,
Which is not death, but life.

What people fear the most, may not be death itself,
but what may lie beyond the grave;
As seen from this side, who can tell
the rigours of this path and its eventual end?

The greatest test will come
if we will let God's song be sung in us;

For then the death we fear is changed to life
by Him in whom we trust,
and all the glorious promises of God
come good in hope.

Sing Your song of love, Oh Lord,
and touch and melt the hearts
of those who stumble still;
Stay with us, Lord, who travel on from life to death,
and thence we pray, to life again,
with You.

Bible Passage

Psalm 10:12-18

- ¹² Rise up, O Lord;
O God, lift up your hand;
do not forget the oppressed.
- ¹³ Why do the wicked renounce God,
and say in their hearts,
“You will not call us to account”?
- ¹⁴ But you do see! You note trouble and grief,
that you may take it into your hands;
the helpless commit themselves to you;
you have been the helper of the orphan.
- ¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers;
seek out their wickedness until you find none.
- ¹⁶ The Lord is king forever and ever;
the nations shall perish from his land.
- ¹⁷ O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek;
you will strengthen their heart,
you will incline your ear
- ¹⁸ to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed,
so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

Review

Psalm 10 began by asking the question ‘why does God appear to be absent’ (10:1), but told us that this belief was at the heart of wickedness, because those who believed that God could not see them oppressed the poor and needy (see verses 8-10). Today we read the rest of the psalm, which talks about God’s concern for the underprivileged and what He does to protect them from the wicked. The Lord acts with justice in dealing with the wicked and mercy towards the poor and needy.

Throughout Scripture, the Lord showed special concern for those who suffered because of the wickedness of others, especially at the hands of those who had forgotten God or ignored Him (as in 10:13). The Old Testament records many times when God's people forgot Him, yet when they cry out, he responded. This happened when the people of Israel were in Egypt and the Lord saved them through Moses (Exodus 1&2), and also in the famous stories of the Judges (Judges 2:11-23) who came to the rescue of God's people even though they kept falling away from Him. The most famous example of this was when Judah was taken into captivity into Babylon (e.g. Isaiah 17:12; Jeremiah 3:18-4:2), and while they were in their deepest troubles, the prophets gave them God's word of love and salvation (see Isaiah 53). These powerful works of God are reflected in this psalm, for at the end, He is the one who hears the cry of the afflicted (10:17), acts justly against the wicked who have caused suffering (10:15), and moreover, will help victims (10:14,17).

This psalm is typical of all scriptures in painting a picture of God acting with both justice and mercy, sometimes at the same time. In psalm 10, the arrogance of the wicked who think of Him as distant and uncaring is met by His righteous judgement of them; 'Break the arm (which means 'stop his power') of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness ...' (10:15). Yet this action is integrally linked to His compassion for the victims of the wicked; 'You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry' (10:17). The psalm tells us that God is entirely consistent in His judgments, and He is also never failing in His mercy to all who turn to Him.

Psalm 10 has a couple of interesting things to say about how the Lord deals with the wicked. The first of these is found in verse 12, which calls on God to 'arise ... lift up Your hand' (10:12). This phrase is like an ancient battle cry (as, for example, in Exodus 15:12), summoning the Lord to battle to confront the wicked who have sinned because they thought he would not do anything (see the first half of the psalm). Verse 15 continues the same theme of judgement as the Lord turns the tables on those who oppressed the poor and needy. Ultimately, we need the help of the Lord to defeat evil, however hard we try!

The second interesting section is found in verse 16. The Lord is described as King, and as a result of His warlike actions, 'the nations will perish from His land'. It would be easy to gloss over this brief reference, but it hides the fact that while God told His people to make Canaan a land of exclusive worship to God, they failed in this task, as the book of Judges shows (see Judges 1 and 2). As a consequence, the 'other nations' remained within Canaan for many centuries. The leaders and kings of the people had failed to remove these peoples from Israel, but here, the Lord Himself promised to do this work and make the land 'pure'. In God's Kingdom, there would be no place for other nation and the worship of other gods. No other 'Kingdoms' would be allowed, because the Kingdom of God was exclusive.

The reassuring words of this psalm in verse 17 that God will 'hear the meek' and 'strengthen their heart' are powerful. Now, in New Testament times when the Kingdom of God has come through Christ, the Lord hears those who call on Him for help and salvation; but more than that, he acts for their defence. God has acted in Christ to fulfil this psalm by defeating evil and raising up those who need His help. Now, we have the God-given task of identifying the equivalent of the oppressed, fatherless and widow in our own society, and we are called act on their behalf for both justice and mercy, by means of His power, authority and strength.

Discipleship

Application

God's call to act with justice

The call to act with justice in today's world will not go away. Some in the church prefer to focus their efforts on evangelism and making disciples, and they believe that this is a sufficient response to what God calls His people to do in the world. However, God knows that there will always be evil in the world and there will always be people who need help. These are the people we can go to with the Gospel, because they know that they need salvation and will be willing to receive a message of hope and of help. Ideally, the Gospel of God's saving grace and the message of justice and salvation go hand in hand; the work of evangelism and of Christian action for justice are at best, one and the same.

Ideas for what to do

- What can you do to help the poor, and how will this reflect the love of God in your heart? Try not to just think about this, but to take some form of action to show this, even if it is just to send some money to a charity.
- Pray for those who work alongside the poor, and who do so because they are Christians and want to help people. Think about what it would be like for you to do such work, indeed, why do you not? Let the challenge rest in your mind and see what the Lord will do ...

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Can you think of examples of where justice and mercy might be considered as two separate things? Is it too simplistic to say they are two sides of the same coin of righteous action?
2. Is it possible to define wickedness? Do the laws of our land give us confidence that we know what is wrong in society?
3. When you call out to God, what is your experience? Have you called out to him when you feel the victim of injustice? What has been God's response?

Final Prayer

This day is Yours, Jesus my Saviour. You gave it, you help me as I live through it, and at its end I will give it back to You. May I always remember that what I think is mine is really Yours, and when I mistakenly think that I control my day, remind me of my frailty and turn me back to You. I owe You everything, Jesus my Saviour: AMEN
