

It began as a childhood prank. A young boy spotted a soldier in uniform. His mischievous mind began to work, and soon he was forming a snowball. He heaved the snowball at the soldier, hoping to get close enough for the soldier to notice- possibly to even startle him. Incredibly, the missile found its mark well, and hit the soldier right in the head. Well, the startled soldier turned and seeing the boy running, took off after him. His adult legs quickly caught up to the much younger ones, and the soldier took the boy in his arms and began to shake him as he lectured on proper respect. As the boy was yelling out, some men began to gather around admonishing the soldier to leave the boy alone. The soldier told the onlookers to mind their own business. Well, one thing quickly led to another. Soon the men were pushing the soldier around. "See how you like it" they taunted. Then the soldier was calling for his superior, Captain Preston who was down the street. Soon the Captain was rushing to the scene with half a dozen more soldiers. By then the crowd was an ugly, threatening mob, and they began trying to manhandle the soldiers until some drew their weapons and fired. Moments later, several were injured, 5 men fell dead, and eventually 8 soldiers were arrested for murder. They were to be tried in the civil court.

Now in this setting, no attorney could be found to defend the soldiers, so unpopular were they in the community. Then a personal friend of Captain Preston's went to see John. John was one of the sharpest lawyers around. And after much pleading, John agreed to take the case. Other attorneys in town were shocked by John's decision- professional suicide, they called it. And it was true. John couldn't even walk down the street without being ridiculed by his neighbors. Nobody seemed to approve of John's decision, and it quickly became apparent to John that this single case might ruin his promising career. But John had examined the circumstances of the case, and he feared that a great injustice might occur if he didn't do what he could. On October 24, the case went to trial. And in court, John proved that Captain Preston had not given any orders to fire upon the civilians, and that the soldiers had used their weapons purely in self-defense. Captain Preston and 5 others were fully acquitted- they had not even shot weapons. The other 2 received jail sentences. Without John, there was no doubt that all 8 would have been sentenced to death whether they had fired a shot or not.

For his services, John received a modest fee and a deluge of public criticism. John very nearly suffered a complete nervous breakdown after this event- but he continued to know in his heart that he had done the right thing. He had stood for justice in the midst of potential anarchy. Also, without John knowing it at the time, American history had been made. For this shooting in the streets of Boston on March 5, 1770, which

began with the throwing of a snowball, would be remembered as the Boston Massacre. It was among the critical events that lead up to our Revolutionary War. And John, that defense attorney, that colonist who dared to risk his own career to side with a handful of British Soldiers so that they might receive a fair trial- well, eventually John would recover his good name and reputation. In fact, people would recognize that what he did was right- and they would respect him for his sense of justice and courage. They would respect him to the point where they would elect him to be the first vice President and second president of the U.S.- John Adams.

Throughout human history, people have recognized and honored a proper sense of justice. Now that doesn't mean that there haven't been times when injustice reigned. Oh, no, there have been far too many times such as these- when might and power reigned over any sense of justice at all. Or when some other value such as money or material things became elevated to the place where true justice would be bought in sacrifice. There have been periods of time when one group of people elevated their own personal value in pride to the place where they put large groups of people in positions of severe injustice. We could point to case situations throughout the world where people are enduring injustice right now. But even during these times, it has been necessary for people to sear their God given sense of inner justice. For there is something within us that recognizes that which is proper and right- justice- and respects that quality in others. That is the reason for our reacting so strongly when our rights have personally been violated- we know an injustice has been performed. That is the reason for some people being willing to sacrifice much, even their careers and reputations, so that others might receive justice.

Why do we feel so strongly about this matter of proper justice being rendered here on the earth? Well, I believe it is because we each have been created in the image and likeness of God. God is a Just God. He is perfect in his justice and righteousness. And part of our having been created in his image and likeness means that we have had a sense of justice created within us. The closer we walk with God, the more important his righteousness and justice will be to us. And the more closely a nation is built upon Biblical principles, the more consistently justice will be found in that nation.

We all recognize the fact that our nation has drifted from its Judeo-Christian foundations in many ways during these past generations. God has been rejected in so many public arenas of life. It should not surprise us that true justice has more and more consistently been sacrificed as we as a nation have moved farther and farther away from our Biblical moorings.

Some time ago I read a modern day version of Little Red Riding Hood. It seemed to me to give a commentary on how much things have changed in so many ways. Let me read it for you:

Once upon a time, in a far away country, there lived a girl named Red Riding Hood. One day her

mother asked her to take a basket of fruit to her grandmother, who had been ill and lived alone in a cottage in the forest. It happened that a wolf was lurking in the bushes and overheard the conversation. He decided to take a shortcut to Grandmother's house and get the goodies for himself. The wolf killed the grandmother, then dressed in her nightgown and jumped into bed to await the little girl. When she arrived, he made several nasty remarks and then tried to grab her. But by this time, the child was very frightened and ran screaming from the cottage. A woodcutter, working nearby, heard her cry and rushed to the rescue. He killed the wolf with his ax, thereby saving Red Riding Hood's life. All the townspeople hurried to the scene and immediately proclaimed the woodcutter to be a hero.

But at the inquest that followed, several facts emerged:

1. The wolf had never been advised of his rights.
2. The woodcutter had made no warning swings before striking the fatal blow.
3. The Civil Liberties Union stressed the point that although the act of eating Grandma may have been in poor taste, the wolf was only "doing his thing" and therefore he did not deserve to be punished.

On the basis of these considerations, it was decided that there was no valid basis for charges against the wolf. Moreover, the woodcutter was indicted for unaggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

One year from the date of the Incident at Grandma's house her cottage was made into a shrine for the wolf that had bled and died there. All the village officials spoke at the dedication service as they placed wreaths at the graveside in honor of the brave and courageous wolf.

Isn't it interesting how justice and righteousness can be turned around and rationalized away when the standards from God's word are left out of the picture. And we realize some of this frustration today in our nation. Certainly, it is proper for people to be read their rights, for warning shots to be fired when possible. But when legal technicalities are allowed to be loopholes for injustice, the wicked learn to use the system for their own advantage and innocent people suffer.

In the midst of such a world, we need to be reminded that God is a God of justice. He is perfect in his righteousness. David suffered great personal injustice. He spent an entire period of his life- about 13 years- running from Saul while having done nothing worthy of punishment. He had been a loyal subject and supporter of the King, yet he was chased as a fugitive. How was he able to deal with such a period in his life without becoming vengeful and bitter? David knew the character of God and he realized that God was a God of absolute justice. One day God would make everything right. So David rested by faith in this truth. It allowed him to keep from taking personal revenge even when he had opportunity to do so. And in his perfect timing, God did bring about vindication for David.

We have been looking at pictures of God given to us by David in Psalm 139 during these past weeks.

We have already seen the God who knows all, the God who is everywhere, the God who has created all things, and the God who is with us. Now this morning, we would like to see the God who is Just. We find this God pictured in verses 19-22 of Psalm 139.

PS 139:19 If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!

PS 139:20 They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.

PS 139:21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you?

PS 139:22 I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.

Now there are some aspects of these verses that are difficult for us to understand. Some of these statements that David makes are rather harsh in nature. He begins by saying, "If only you would slay the wicked, O God." He also says in verse 21-22, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you. I have nothing but hatred for them, I count them my enemies." Rather harsh words. And we are tempted to say, "Now David, don't you know that you are to love your enemies? What kind of words are these for a godly man to speak?" These words are often called imprecatory by theologians - this is one of the imprecatory psalms.

Now we have to realize several points in order to understand these imprecatory statements.

a. There was a great deal of legitimate injustice to which David was subjected. He had reasons to feel violated as a person.

b. There is nothing wrong with expressing our feelings to God. God is a God of truth and honesty. He knows our hearts. If we have some hostile feelings, which we will have at times in life, he would far rather have us express them to him honestly than try to cover them up hypocritically from him or act upon them physically. Wouldn't it be inconsistent for David in this Psalm in which he has already presented God as the one who knows all things, the hidden thoughts of his mind even, to now try to hide his inner feelings against the wicked.

c. There is a great deal of difference between expressing our inner feelings to God in prayer (as David is doing here) and trying to execute personal vengeance on our enemies. These words must be taken in the context of David's life. Sure, he had feelings that were hostile against those who performed injustices against him. Yet, it is not recorded that David sought to repay injustice back to them when he was walking with the Lord.

e.g. When he had opportunities to kill Saul and take over the throne.

So we can conclude from the imprecatory nature of the Psalms that it is proper and right for us to express our innermost feelings honestly to God. He knows what they are anyway- we might as well tell him.

But we do not find any justification from these Psalms for executing personal vendettas against even our enemies- for David did not do this, and we are told in other passages of Scriptures that Vengeance is the Lords- he will repay.

Now what lessons can we learn from David's wrestling with this issue of injustice in his world?

1. Note first of all with me the problems in David's world that bothered him so much:

a. moral degeneracy- If only you would slay the wicked vs. 19. The term wicked in the Bible stands for those who do not accept God's standards of right and wrong and consistently act in violation of them. Those who choose their own standards of morality, fulfilling their own selfish and evil desires.

b. violence- Away from me, you bloodthirsty men. vs. 19 In David's day, as in every day, there were those who felt that their own personal might gave to them license to unjustly exert their own power over another in violation of his or her rights. Might makes right was their motto. And they were in power until someone bigger and stronger came along. This philosophy lead to much violence and bloodshed.

c. Blasphemy- they speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuses your name. vs. 20 This term speaks of those who take sacred things lightly. Those who make fun of that which is holy to God. God's name is very precious to him for it represents his very character- we blaspheme when we use it lightly without meaning. God's word is very precious to him for it is an extension of his character- we blaspheme when we don't have proper respect for it.

d. Rebellion- Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you. vs. 21. This term refers to those who refuse to acknowledge God as God, who try to usurp his rightful position in their lives. Like Lucifer of old, they will be God in their lives and will have no other God on their heart's throne. To God, this is an act of rebellion- for He alone is the creator and sustainer of life in the world.

Now we immediately see that these problems of injustice that David faced were not unique to his day. Every generation has faced them, we continue to battle against them today. Moral degeneracy, violence, blasphemy, rebellion continue to be sinful expressions of the human heart- and godly people are grieved deeply by them, just as David was.

2. What should be the response of the godly person to these injustices? In light of the fact that God is a God of justice, how should we respond to this?

The context of David's words in this Psalm show us 2 responses that he had to these injustices. I would like to close with a look at these responses briefly, for I think that they give in part an example of the godly response to injustice.

1. David had confidence in the God of Justice- this fact is given in the emphasis on the omniscience and power of God throughout this entire psalm.

You see, some have read David's words "If only you would slay the wicked" as expressing doubt in David's mind as to whether injustice was ever going to be rectified. To see these words in this way takes them out of the context of the whole Psalm. It is impossible to study this entire Psalm and see any doubt in David's mind that God had the knowledge and power to execute his justice. Rather, these words show the struggle that David was having with his own impatience. If only you would execute your justice now, O God. If only you would slay the wicked right now, is the obvious flow of his thought.

David has spoken of a God who knows everything- even the innermost thoughts of his creatures. David has spoken of a God who is everywhere in the fullness of his being- no wicked person can hide from him. David has spoken of a God who is the creator of all people- he is the one who has ultimate power over every being on this planet. And David had the confidence that God as a God of justice would one day execute his righteous judgments making all injustices right.

We need to have that same confidence in God today. We also need to have the patience that David demonstrated today. How easy it is to become disillusioned and discouraged. As we look at the injustices all around us, as we hear of all of the child abuse and see so many getting rich profiting off of child pornography, as we look around the world at so many Christians and other innocent people who are being persecuted by wicked leaders abusing their power, it's so easy to wonder when God is going to step in and execute his justice.

We certainly need to work for justice on this earth- for that is to the benefit of all people. But when those times come when injustices occur beyond our control- and they are many- we need to remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:17-19: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, It is mine of avenge; I will repay, says the Lord."

Our confidence in the God of justice and our patience as we wait for him to work reveals the fact that we know the God of the Bible.

b. But the second response of David was that of self-examination. We are going to look at this more fully next week as we conclude our studies on this Psalm, so we will just touch on it in closing this morning. But before his complaint to God concerning injustice, David revealed his confidence and knowledge of God. After his complaint in concluding this psalm, David gives these words of self-examination: READ 139:23-24.

PS 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

PS 139:24 See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Just as it is difficult for one to paint all day without getting some of that paint on his clothing, so it is difficult for us to live in this world where so much injustice abounds without some of that rubbing off on us as well. We can find ourselves justifying some practices of injustice in our own lives perhaps in our work ethics, we can find ourselves accepting mental value systems of those in the world around us, we can find ourselves perhaps reacting against injustice to the place where anger and bitterness is found in our own lives- we need to be concerned about ourselves even as David was.

The reality of the world is that injustice abounds all around us. There is moral degeneracy, there is violence, there is blasphemy, there is spiritual rebellion. They abound. We are powerless to stop them- only God is able to bring complete justice to this world. How should we respond to such a world? We should live the life of faith trusting in the God of Justice who in his time will bring all matters to a proper conclusion. And we should be concerned for our own lives, examining ourselves daily, lest the defilement of this world permeate our own souls.