



SERMON RECAP

NOVEMBER 9, 2025

Vengeance Psalms: Woe to the Wicked

Series: Spirituality for Justice

Psalm 109

Last week I proposed that “soon” is the most frustrating word in the English language, and gave you a hint about the most frustrating two words are: “Calm down.” Is there anything worse that you can say to someone who is upset? It is dismissive and disrespectful. It’s basically saying, “My comfort is more important than your distress.”

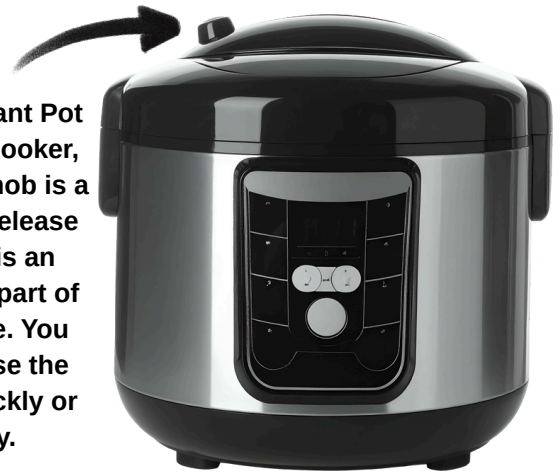
“Calm down” is the worst thing you can say to someone who has been victimized. Unfortunately however, much of Christian church life and worship is little more than a big “Calm down,” to the world’s suffering. Many expect worship to be a time of ceaseless praise and joy. The expression of joy in the midst of trouble can be powerful. There is power in that kind of resistance. The problem however, comes when the only acceptable expressive emotion is joy and praise. We are human. To deny emotions like sadness, depression, fatigue, and yes - anger - is to deny our humanity.

One of my favorite kitchen gadgets is my InstantPot. It is a pressure cooker, and I used it twice last week to make dinner. There is a little knob on the top of it that is for venting. You have to have it closed for it to work properly, but the ability to release the pressure is not only an important safety feature. It is also used strategically depending on the recipe. Some things need a slow, natural release, but some things need the “quick release” to avoid overcooking.

Psalm 109 is a quick release Psalm. It is a tough one to read. If you get a chance to read it out loud, it will probably make you uncomfortable. It is hard to get through lines like “Let his children become orphans; let his wife turn into a widow. Let his children wander aimlessly, begging, driven out of their ruined homes. Let a creditor seize everything he owns; let strangers plunder his wealth” and think, “that sounds like the story of God’s love for the people God loves.”

How can this be Scripture? How can this sit in the same book as Jesus telling us to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt. 5:44)

On an Instant Pot pressure cooker, this little knob is a pressure release valve. It is an important part of the device. You can release the steam quickly or slowly.



There are a few things you have to remember when you read a psalm like this.

1) Anger is human. To deny anger is to deny one’s humanity. It is a natural reaction to being harmed. The psalmist has been victimized. To deny the expression of anger is to re-victimize the person. There is a thing called toxic forgiveness. It is pressuring someone to move to forgiveness before expressing the pain and anger.

2) Whenever you read angry Biblical passages, find why the writer - or God - is angry. In this case, the wicked one “chased after the poor and needy - even the brokenhearted - with deadly intent” (v. 16). Whenever God is angry in the Bible, it is usually because the orphan, widow, and stranger were being mistreated or exploited.

It is okay to express anger when the wicked chase the brokenhearted. When the powerful chase the brokenhearted to destroy families, pursue them into their homes or even a daycare center, there is reason to be angry. When cruelty becomes policy, there is reason to cry out to God to make things right.

3) This is an expression of anger, not an act of violence. This is the quick release of steam. It is important to be able to do, but we also have to be careful. When you release the valve on the Instant Pot, it is easy to burn your hand if you’re not careful. We can’t dwell in anger.

For those pursuing justice, Psalms like 109 are an important part of our spiritual life. We cannot pretend everything is okay. When we see people being harmed, having someone say “Calm down,” is not going to help. It is okay to go the Psalms of rage. Anger is human, but it needs to be channeled in healthy ways. Sometimes it is a spiritual exercise to go to Psalm 109 and hit the “quick release” valve.