

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

May 16, 2010



Real Spirituality: Voicing Our Anger

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”...

Reading Psalm 137 is shocking for us all. Finding yourself a skeptic of Christianity you look at a passage such as this one and think “the violence advocated here is exactly why I don’t follow Christ.” If you’re a Christian you read Psalm 137 and perhaps think “I’m shocked that someone vocally expressed what I’ve been feeling.” In context Psalm 137 moves us from shock to expression as we understand God’s desire for anger.

The cause of anger brought to light here in Psalm 137 is not a self-centered anger, the type that runs rampant in a traffic jam. Instead, it focuses on the sort of anger that runs deep in the heart. Then living in the reality of Exile, the Israelites knew well this sort of anger. Residing in the Babylonian empire they never forgot the horrific memories of Jerusalem in flames, women being raped, and babies being murdered. They had experienced a

palpable injustice first hand. When we hear about atrocities, local or global, we almost feel injustice, but how do we do that? C.S. Lewis writes that in this regard “atheism is too simple.” Without a standard outside of ourselves, the pursuit of justice is random or discriminate. Psalm 137 shows us that such a standard of justice is best expressed by God’s nature and subsequently His law.

If we find our anger consonant with the justice of God, the question still remains “what do we do with our anger”? Psalm 137 calls us to prayer, to give voice to our anger before God. As such, the text shows us a way beyond stuffing and venting. This third way trusts God to ultimately address injustice by voicing our genuine feelings to Him. Taking matters into our own hands may offer us temporary relief, but it never assuages the heart.

Yet this leads us to another question. How do we wait on God amidst

injustice? The answer to this question is found in the very dynamic of treating injustice. Every injustice must bear a debt, a cost. If no payment for injustice is made, there can be neither justice nor hope for us in this world. God’s anger burns along with us regarding the injustice of this world. Coincidentally, injustice is something we all take part in. But although God ardently demands justice be served he also desires to lavish his love upon us. He was able to reconcile both pursuits in the death of His Son. Amazingly Jesus died paying for our infinite debt of injustice unto God and thereby enabled God to lavish His love upon us. Believing in Christ therefore, gives us a radical new ability. First, we can pray authentically unto God and we can wait on his final word of justice. But not only this we can make an offer of grace to our enemy, inviting them to truth, change, and dignity.

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: Psalm 137

1. Describe the varieties of anger found in our broader culture. What are the foundations of these types of anger? Are there any problems with these foundations?
2. How has the church often failed to foster a healthy approach to anger?
3. What have you learned about your own anger? What has been affirming and what has been challenging?
4. Read Psalm 137 again. What is the psalmist doing with his anger? How is it different from “venting” or “stuffing”?
5. Is retaliation a satisfying response to injustice? Why or why not? Have you ever understood this personally?
6. Why does injustice always incur debt? Said another way, why does justice always require a payment? Explore the options if no payment exists.
7. Describe how the cross of Christ enables the reconciliation of God’s justice and love. Why couldn’t God simply love us without all the bloodshed of the cross?
8. Reflecting on thoughts from question #7 describe how the cross leads us to worship God alone.
9. The three “take-away” points are listed below. What of these or anything else are you taking away?
 - Praying-Bringing our anger to him.
 - Waiting-For God’s justice to be served.
 - Offering-A word of grace to our enemy.

Righteous Anger

As we look around our society and even at our own life we are angry people. We unleashed rage on the person who cut us off, the restaurant who incorrectly packaged our to-go order, and the boss who sent us jelly-of-the-month club instead of money for our Christmas bonus. When we really boil it down much of our anger falls into two categories highlighted by the sermon. From a religious standpoint we often look at what we’ve done for God and with fists raised in the air we cry “God, you owe me!”. We also get angry when life blocks our pleasures. Why did our neighbor need help fixing his mower during the final episode of *Lost*? Either foundation for anger is not rooted in Christ, but instead our own little empires.

What would it look like to be angry for the right reasons? Of course, this is something we find ourselves doing as well. We experience the injustice of working hard at our jobs, only to watch another co-worker get the promotion because of political maneuver. It makes us angry to sit on the sidelines of the situation in Darfur. We have a sense of righteousness because deep in our souls we have a sense of God’s economy. We’re aware that something is askew in the world and that sense is only heightened for those who follow Christ because we find ourselves in a special covenantal relationship with God. We long for and even expect God’s redemption, now in part and one day in full. As we journey with Christ we should ask ourselves, “Am I angry over the right things?”. How does Christ help us to handle and change our unrighteous anger? How might Christ be calling us to anger in areas where we have typically felt apathetic? May God guide us in our anger.

“If you’ve found God with ease then perhaps it’s not God you’ve found.”

Thomas Merton