

Psalms: Expressing Our Emotions

Lesson 14 - When It's OK to Curse

Warm up -

1. What kind of stuff makes you really steamed?
 - surprise quizzes
 - friends who "borrow" stuff and never give it back
 - being lectured by your mom for something you didn't even do
 - drivers who tailgate
 - bullies who pick on little kids
 - other :
2. In what ways can we get back at someone who has wronged us?
3. How do you treat someone who has mistreated you? Is it OK to get mad, or are we supposed to "turn the other cheek" (to use Jesus' expression)?

Lesson -

It's probably a good thing we don't say everything we think. Scratch that. It's a *very* good thing we don't say everything we think. . . to the little old lady who's driving twenty in a zone where the speed limit is thirty-five. . . or to the guy with four little kids who cuts in front of you at McDonald's. On those occasions, we're better off biting our tongue, hard as it may be.

The psalmists, though, don't always demonstrate that kind of restraint. They rail against evil people with a passion that makes us cringe. Their desire for bad stuff to happen to their enemies sounds pretty mean, to say the least. Consider this, for example: "May his children be beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes" (Ps. 109:10). Or "Happy is he . . . who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks" (Ps. 137: 8-9).

These wishes sound downright barbaric. At the very least, they strike us as being contrary to what Jesus teaches in the gospels about loving your enemy.

But the truth is, they are a part of the psalms. And they belong there. Remember that we are not the audience for these psalms, God is. Try to put yourself in the psalmists' shoes: if truly evil people have taken your land and killed your children and make slaves of you and your family, God is really the only court in the world where you can go with your grievances. We don't have to look far back in our own history to see atrocities like this: think of the Holocaust. Or the killings in Rwanda. Or the shootings at Columbine.

So the next time you're angry or hurt or confused, don't hide it from God. After all, God's the only one who can do something about your pain. And God's listening.

Read Psalm 137

1. As you read this, find out who the psalmist is addressing.
2. What do the Babylonians ask the Israelites to do? Why is this both difficult and insulting?
3. What have the Babylonians done to Jerusalem? Why would this be especially hard on a Jewish person?
4. What course of action can we take if we have been wronged by another person?
5. Think of something that makes you angry. How do you express your anger and frustration to God?
6. What does this psalm teach you about the character of God? Does knowing this help you in any way?
7. How do you explain the psalmist's desire for revenge on his enemies in the light of Jesus' teachings about loving our enemies?
8. Suppose your neighbor tells you he doesn't think much of the Christian God because so much of the Old Testament, including the Psalms, talks about situations that are violent and horrible. What do you say?