

Crime

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[0 : 00] So, in March last year in Pennsylvania in America, a mugger jumped into the back of a taxi at an intersection and demanded the driver's belongings.

But there were two things this mugger didn't know. The first is that the taxi had a dash cam that was recording the whole event. You can see a picture of that behind me.

This is part of the mugging that took place. You can find this video online. And the first thing this mugger didn't know is that this was being recorded, which would have been okay for him as he was wearing a mask, except for the second fact that he didn't know.

He neglected to notice that directly behind the taxi he chose to hold up was a police car. How he didn't notice is anyone's guess, but he was very surprised upon leaving the taxi to find himself tackled to the ground and arrested the moment he had performed his crime.

It's something that people refer to as instant karma, seeing someone immediately get what they deserve. You can find videos on YouTube called Instant Karma Collections where you see crimes that have just taken place and it turns out that a policeman was standing right behind them or something.

[1 : 09] It's very satisfying to watch these videos where the bad guy immediately gets what they deserve. The problem is, though, it doesn't happen nearly often enough, does it?

Especially in our country, in South Africa. The idea of instant karma or the idea of karma, which is based on this Eastern philosophy that people get what they deserve, it's a nice idea, but it's just not true, is it?

When we look around in our society, most crimes committed in our country don't see justice, which leaves Christians especially having to answer a very difficult question, which is that if our God is a God of justice, then why is there so much injustice in the world that he's made?

Why doesn't he do something to stop it? It's a good question, isn't it? And it happens to be the exact question that the writer of the psalm that we read, Psalm 10, asks in the opening of his psalm.

Did you have a look at that? When he considered the crime and injustice in his world, in his society, he says this, verse 1, Why, Lord, do you stand far off?

[2 : 21] Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? Isn't that a question you've asked? Maybe not out loud, but in the back of your mind?

Don't you often feel that way when you consider the evil in our world, when you look at the news, when you read the newspapers, and it just seems that God is doing nothing about it? Don't you ask that same question that the psalmist asked?

I do. Often we do. And this psalm, Psalm 10, admits that this is how God's people will often feel in a world where lots of evil happens.

Lots of crimes go unpunished. But that's not all the psalm admits. You know, these psalms, the amazing thing about the book of Psalms is that the psalms are very human.

You know, the psalms ask questions that we've all got. The psalms express frustrations that we all have. But that's not all they do. They also give us answers. They also change the way we look at things, and it challenges the way we look at things.

[3 : 23] And so this psalm, while it raises the question, why does God seem so far off, it also goes on to teach us about evil itself, why evil exists in the first place, and how God's people are to view and to deal with evil when it touches our lives, which all too often it does.

So that's what the psalm is here to teach us. And it's important for us to learn. It's important for you and me and all of us to pay attention this morning and hear the words of the psalm, not least of all in a country with such a crime problem as our own.

And so the first thing we learn about crime from the psalm is actually its cause. And it might surprise you to know that crime is a result of bad theology. Now what on earth do I mean by that?

How can crime be a result of theology? Criminals don't go to Bible college. So what's the link? Well, the first thing that we need to understand is that everybody has a theology.

Not just those people who have gone to theological college and studied theology. Everybody, from the businessman to the beggar, has a theology, has an understanding of who God is.

[4 : 34] Even atheists have a theology, namely that God doesn't exist. That's what they believe. But it's the belief about God. And everybody, whether they know it or not, believes something about God.

Everybody has a theology. And further, what you believe about God, whatever your theology is, actually affects the way you live your life more than you know. What you believe influences what you live for, how you live, and what your priorities are day to day.

And we see that in this psalm. We see the link between what a person believes and how they live. So, from verse 2 onwards, the psalmist goes on to describe the criminal, the typical criminal of his age, which we'll notice is not very different to the typical criminal of our age.

And he describes what he says and what he thinks. And I want you to notice what he writes from verse 2. In his arrogance, the wicked man hunts down the weak who are caught in the schemes he devises.

He boasts about the cravings of his heart. He blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord. In his pride, the wicked man does not seek him. And in all his thoughts, there is no room for God.

[5 : 45] Okay, so here's a little snapshot of the typical criminal. Isn't it so apt? And doesn't it show us that the criminal mind hasn't changed in 3,000 years since the psalm was written?

A person who schemes, who constantly is sitting down and scheming up ways to get what he craves from the weak and innocent. Coming up with new and novel ways to steal and to rob and to murder.

You know, it makes you think of those guys on the N1 or the N2, rather, who think up ways to stop cars so they can hijack them. Whether it's putting concrete blocks in the road or throwing eggs on the windscreen so that when you wipe it, you've got no visibility and you're forced to stop.

And there are people, it's scary to think, there are people who are sitting right now scheming up new ways to steal, to rob, to murder, to do all forms of evil.

And the psalm describes those people who are constantly thinking of how to exploit the weak and innocent. Not just in overt, you know, violent crimes, but financial crimes and fraud and cons.

[6 : 55] I don't know if you've ever been conned, whether it's an email scam or whatever. But you often come across stories of people who have been conned out of tens of thousands of rands because of some investment that they were promised and it never came out.

And this is just, again, criminals thinking of ways to steal and take money. And so here's this example of a typical criminal. But I want you to notice what's at the root of all his behavior.

What causes him to be scheming up these crimes? What causes and motivates him to live like this and behave like this? At the end of verse 3, it's because he reviles the Lord.

You notice that? Verse 4, in his pride, the wicked man does not seek God. In all his thoughts, there is no room for God.

And so his criminal behavior, the psalm teaches us, is linked to his view of God. In verse 5, we're told he rejects God's laws. And then in verse 11, we find out why he rejects God's laws, why he has no consideration for doing right or doing wrong.

[8 : 05] Verse 11, he says to himself, God will never notice. He covers his face and he never sees. That's what the criminal believes. And how could it not be?

I mean, to wantonly commit a crime, you've got to believe that you can get away with it. Not just now, but in eternity. And you've got to believe that if God exists at all, he doesn't really see or care what you do.

You have to believe that if you're going to carry on living an overtly criminal life. In other words, my point is, crime is the result of bad theology.

Crime is the result of believing false things. Criminals continue to do what they do because of a false belief about God. That's what this psalm teaches.

And it's a really good point, just as an aside. To remember that our theology determines our behavior. We see it in the psalm when it comes to criminals.

[9 : 07] But it's the same for all of us. Our theology, what we believe about God, determines how we live and what we live for. And so that's, as I say, this is an aside. It's not about crime. But it's just a point to note.

Because, you know, the reason we come to church, the reason we go to study the Bible in growth groups, the reason we read our Bibles in our day-to-day lives, is not just for a boost for the day.

It's not just to read a verse which is going to carry us for the day. It's to change us from the inside out, to challenge the way we think about the world. We read the Bible, we study the Bible to change our theology, to change what we believe so that we start living out our lives in response to that.

The Bible is here. God has given us His Word to change our minds, to change our worldview, to change how we view our lives and our world. So that should be one of your primary motivations for coming to sit under God's Word.

Because it's through this that He changes us to be the people He wants us to be. But the point is, and going back to the point, theology determines your behavior and it's very much the case with criminals as well.

[10 : 16] But they have this false belief about God. But it's not just about God. They also have a false belief about themselves. Notice in verse 4, again, it says, In his pride, the wicked man does not seek Him.

In his pride. It's because of his pride that he doesn't seek God. Now literally, in the original, this reads, it's quite a funny phrase. It reads, According to the height of his nose, he doesn't seek God.

You've got to love Hebrew. Hebrew's got these really colorful idioms. And that's a figure of speech which describes arrogance according to the height of his nose. Thinking highly of oneself, looking down on others.

And according to this verse, the more, the higher one's noses, the more one thinks of oneself, the less they consider God. According to the height of his nose, he does not seek God.

Because they think they're smart enough, they're strong enough to get what they want and ignore God's laws and decide for themselves what's right and wrong. Kind of reminds me of Adam and Eve, doesn't it?

[11 : 20] They wanted to decide for themselves what's right and wrong. They had pride in themselves. They wanted to be their own rulers, their own gods. And that's something inside each one of us. But it's also what motivates the criminal.

His false view of himself. That he thinks he's big and important and strong enough to call the shots in his life. And he's not going to get caught. False view of God.

False view of self. But there's a third false view that the criminal holds. And that's a false belief about the future. In verse 13, he says to himself, He won't call me to account.

Do you notice that? That's the belief of the criminal. The other belief of the criminal. Again, you can't carry on happily committing crime if you really, really believe that one day you're going to stand before God and answer for everything you've done.

You can't truly believe that and keep on committing crime without any hesitation. But the criminal doesn't believe that. And that's why they carry on their crimes and their criminal behavior.

[12 : 19] And so that's the first thing I want you to notice from this psalm. The root of criminal behavior in our society, the root cause of it is not poverty.

It's not bad parenting. Or any of the other factors that people pin on the cause of crime in our world, in our society. Of course, those things play a role.

But according to the Bible, the root of crime is bad theology. That's where crime comes from. A wrong, a perverted view of God and of the future and of yourself.

Now, that's helpful to know. But it still doesn't answer our question, does it? It still doesn't answer the psalmist's question. Why doesn't God do something about it? If the criminals are mistaken in their theology, why doesn't God correct their theology by coming down and showing them his judgment?

Well, the answer to this question is rooted in good theology. Because when we read the Bible, what we discover is that we shouldn't be too quick to ask God to judge and eradicate all the evil in our world because we ourselves are not as innocent as we think.

[13 : 35] Look again at the psalm, at the description of the criminal from verse 4. I'll read it again. And I want you just to notice the words that are used and how this criminal is described.

In his pride, the wicked man does not seek God. In all his thoughts, there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous. Your laws are rejected by him.

He sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, Nothing will ever shake me. He swears no one will ever do me harm. His mouth is full of lies and threats. Trouble and evil are under his tongue.

And we read this, and we think, yeah, these terrible godless criminals, I wish God would give them what they deserve. But then, we read Romans 3, 10 to 18, which Alan read for us earlier.

This is Paul's description of mankind in general, and I want you to listen and compare what he says about all people to Psalm 10. He says, As it is written, there is no one righteous.

[14 : 39] Not even one. There is no one who understands. No one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have together become worthless. There is no one who does good. Not even one.

Their throats are open graves. Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. You know that last bit that Paul's quoting from the Old Testament here?

That last bit is a direct quotation from Psalm 10. Translated from Hebrew to Greek, so the words aren't exactly the same. But Paul is referring here to Psalm 10, and you see what he's saying?

Do you see his point? In Romans 3, he's saying that this psalm that we read in the Old Testament that we think is describing the worst elements in our society, the gangsters on the Cape Flats and the guys sitting in Polesmoor, this psalm is all about them.

But then Paul pulls the rug from under us and says, no, it's not. It's about you. According to God, who sees not just our acts, but searches down into the motives of our hearts and sees every idle thought and word, according to God, we are all criminals.

[15 : 47] We may not have broken the laws of society, but each one of us has broken God's laws. And so if God really did what we want him to do and came down and put an end to all criminals, you know what that would mean?

Putting an end to all of us. And the reason he's not doing that yet, the reason he's delaying his ultimate judgment, which is going to come, make no mistake, God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice.

The Bible tells us that, but the reason he's delaying is not because he doesn't care or because he's far off. It's because he does care and he wants to give you and me a way out of that judgment before it comes.

And he gives us that way out in his son, Jesus Christ, who came to be treated like a criminal, even though he had never broken any laws of God or society.

Jesus Christ, who came to be executed like a criminal to die for crimes that he didn't commit. Crimes against God.

[16 : 52] Crimes that you and I commit every day. Our pride and our rebellion and thinking we can live how we want for what we want and not spare a thought most of the time for what God wants in our lives and thinking we can get away with it.

Do you see how our minds are not that different to the criminal mind? Well, we can't get away with it. The criminal in Psalm 10 learns eventually they can't get away with it and we can't get away with it.

There is a price to pay for every sin we've committed against our creator, but that is a price that Jesus Christ has paid on the cross for all who come to him and trust in him and follow him. And so if you haven't done that yet, if you haven't yet, if you're still weighing up whether this Christian thing is for you, whether you're going to come back to church, I think what's going to convince you is to realize that in God's eyes, you are a criminal.

That's what the Bible says. In God's eyes, you have a penalty to pay for your sins, which is his terrible judgment, but he has sent Jesus to take that for you, to give you immunity from your crimes against God.

Isn't that a good reason to come back to church? Isn't that a good reason to take Jesus seriously in your life and to believe in him and to accept him? Because no one else, no one else can give you immunity for your sins against God other than Jesus Christ.

[18 : 19] He's the only person who's ever died for the sins of human beings. And that is why God is delaying so that you can come and have your sins washed away before God brings on you the judgment that you are asking him to bring on others.

That's why God seems unresponsive to evil in our world, not because he doesn't care, but because he cares more than you know. And he will judge all evil in the time he chooses, but in the meantime, we ought to wait patiently knowing why he's delaying.

It's very important when we consider crime and suffering and the evil in this world, it's very important to know why God is not bringing his final judgment yet. It's an act of mercy for you and for me and for every other person out there who has not yet had their sins forgiven through Jesus Christ, who we as a church exist to go tell.

Let's not dilly-dally. Let's go out there and let's not waste any time and let's warn these people and tell them the only way of salvation that exists for them before God's judgment comes.

The final question I want us to look at, though, this morning as we consider Psalm 10 is that how do we deal with crime? How do we deal with this evil while we wait for God to come and judge?

[19 : 34] The answer, again, of course, comes from good theology, understanding the Bible, understanding what it teaches us because we also learn in Psalm 10 that strength to stand against evil comes from good theology.

So the criminal does what he does because of bad theology, but our strength as God's people to stand against him or her and to stand against the evil in this world comes from knowing God's word, knowing good theology.

So listen to how the Psalm goes on. Here we see, from verse 16, we see an example of a child of God who's exposed to this crime in the world, who's frustrated, who's crying out to God, but who nonetheless sees the situation through the eyes of faith.

And look what he writes, verse 16, the Lord is king forever and ever. The nations will perish from his land. You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted. You encourage them and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

That's the hope he has. That's what he knows to be the truth. Despite what he sees around him, this is what the Psalmist's good theology based on God's word causes him to know at the end of the day.

[20 : 53] Notice, he has a good theology about three things as opposed to the wicked. He has a right theology about God, he has a right theology about himself, and he's got a right theology about the future.

And that is what gives him the strength in the face of evil. In fact, verse 17 reads in the NIV, the Bible that we're using, it reads, you encourage the afflicted, but it literally, in the original again, it says, you give strength to their heart.

And this, the strength that he's talking about, that God gives to the afflicted, the strength to live in an evil world, it comes from knowing the truth firstly about God.

verse 16, that he is still king, that he still does rule this world and everything that happens in this world. There's nothing that happens randomly and there's nothing that happens outside of his control.

But also, verse 17, we know that he hears our cries and he does care and he does hear the prayers of his people, even if he doesn't seem to answer right away.

[21 : 59] And therefore, knowing that about God, we know that no evil can touch his children beyond what he allows for their good, for their discipline, what they need for their ultimate salvation, what they need to build their faith.

But other than that, God won't let evil touch his children and this is a very good reason for it. So we need not fear if we are God's people in the face of evil. And not that that means we're immune to evil, no.

We're not immune to evil and its effects, but we know that God can turn evil into our ultimate good because he is still sovereign, he is still king, he is still ruling. And we believe, Romans 8, 28, in all things, God will work for the good of those who love him, in all things, even the evil, even the bad things.

And his children must believe that as we go out into another world, into another week in this world, full of crime and evil and brokenness and suffering, we must believe that God is sovereign.

Strength comes from knowing the truth about God. Strength also comes from knowing the truth about ourselves. Verse 17 says, You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted. I keep on going back to the original because Psalms, Hebrew is difficult to translate as it is and sometimes we lose stuff in translation.

[23 : 24] The word here at the end of verse 17, the afflicted, literally means humble. It's the word for humble. You hear the desire of the humble. That is, people who acknowledge their loneliness, people who acknowledge their sin and their lowly standing before a holy God as opposed to the proud earlier in the Psalm who don't care.

Humility is vital. Humility, recognition of our own crimes against God is vital because that's what helps us to keep things in perspective, doesn't it?

When we see ourselves, when we realize, I actually don't deserve a good world. I don't deserve to live in a society where everybody obeys God because I don't. I don't deserve more than this broken world.

That's what humility does. It puts things in perspective for us. It also drives us to Jesus to find healing and hope and forgiveness and access to a new world where there is no brokenness.

But then finally, strength comes from knowing the future. Verse 16, look what he says. He says, the nations will perish from the land. Now this is language of the Israelites entering the promised land and driving out all the pagan, ungodly, godless people and influences.

[24 : 44] But that was, we know, we've just studied Joshua recently, we know that the Israelites and their history going into the promised land was only a foretaste of God's people entering the world to come in future, in eternity, which will be inhabited by the children of God who have found salvation from their crimes in Jesus Christ.

And it's a world without any evil influences. It's a world without sin and its effects. It's a world without suffering or pain or crime or any evil where mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

that is the world that God's children know is coming because they have the right view of the future as well. And knowing, knowing that, knowing the future when you've come and found salvation in Jesus Christ and you've come and found assurance of your standing before God and assurance of where you're going when you die, knowing that, knowing that that world is real and knowing that you are going to be there one day if you're a believer, that certain hope and that alone at the end of the day is what gives you the strength you need to face the evils of this passing age.

But right now I'm going to pray for us. Yes, Lord, we want to be free of the brokenness of this world. We want to be immune to the evil and crime, but we know there's a reason why you haven't yet come and put an end to it.

We know it's because we are criminals in your sight, but we also know that Jesus has come to take our punishment for us. We thank you for that. We thank you for sending Jesus and we pray, Lord, that you would help us to trust in him.

[26 : 31] I pray for anybody here this morning who hasn't yet come to Jesus and put their faith in him. Help them, Lord, to take that step of coming into a real relationship with you, the relationship that you made them for.

And, Lord, I pray for those of us who have trusted in Christ that you would strengthen us in this broken world, that you would strengthen us through your word and through the knowledge that you are sovereign and that you are present with us wherever we go.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.