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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Psalm 79
Title of sermon: **I'm So Angry**
Series: Don't Settle for Normal - #2

Psalm 79 - NIV:

1 O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. **2** They have left the dead bodies of your servants as food for the birds of the sky, the flesh of your own people for the animals of the wild. **3** They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. **4** We are objects of contempt to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us. **5** How long, LORD? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire? **6** Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name; **7** for they have devoured Jacob and devastated his homeland. **8** Do not hold against us the sins of past generations; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need. **9** Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. **10** Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants. **11** May the groans of the prisoners come before you; with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die. **12** Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord. **13** Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will proclaim your praise.

Don't settle for normal -- well, unless you're using your dryer. Then normal's not bad. We're in a series, and we are addressing what oftentimes people are talking about in terms of "the new normal." And what we're trying to address is -- what is "the new normal"? Well, "the new normal" was supposed to be next week. We were anticipating gathering again, and we were thinking that we were going to get back together again, and it was going to be a new normal, and we were going to check in with the church, and we were going to sign up online, and it was going to be 250 people, and it was going to be really hard and weird, but it was going to be "the new normal"! And then, our governor said "No" and the Supreme Court said that she gets to rule forever, and -- well. We will be together before the ice age melts. I promise you. So -- until then, I'm angry! I'm so angry I gotta preach a sermon on my anger! That's what we're gonna talk about tonight. What we're going to wrestle with over these weeks are these emotions. Not just because of COVID, but because of racism, and because of the riots, and because of all the things that are happening. We have emotions, and what do we do with them? And then we have convictions that we need to develop, because if we don't have those convictions, we're gonna lose our minds, and then we're gonna have assignments that God's gonna give us, and if we don't have those assignments, we're not gonna know what to do.

In Oklahoma, they have this law -- it's called the "Failure to Report" law. And what it was instituted for is because there's a lot of times, in terms of abuse, predominantly towards children, where somebody is abusing a child and somebody else doesn't report it, they're held accountable. So, in one situation, there was a stepmom, and she was abusing her stepchildren. The husband -- her husband and the father of the children -- knew it was going on, and when she was actually abusing the children, he'd walk outside, wouldn't address the situation. He would take off, go outside, knows the abuse was going on. Ultimately, she killed the two kids. She was sentenced for; I think it was a couple hundred years. Because of the law, the Failure to Report law -- he got a hundred years.

Justice? Yes. But there was another situation where a man was abusing his two children -- one was three, one was one. Mom came home, she was working at night. She came home, and she was playing with her son one day, and she noticed he was limping, and so, she took him to the doctor. The doctor was suspicious, took an X-ray, and this young man, three years of age, had a fracture in his leg. They called in DHS, the police. The husband was arrested. The wife was arrested. He got two years for abuse of the children. She -- though she did not touch the children -- got 30 years. Justice? I'll let you decide.

A lady came into my office one day -- she was distraught. Her husband was having an affair, and, of all things, he was going to church with his new girlfriend -- in another church, here in town. So, I called the other pastor and said, "Hey, there's a guy going to your church with a woman from your church. They're sitting in your church, I hear about the sixth row back. Will you help us? He's having an affair! With a person in your church!" The pastor's response was this -- "Well, we want sinners to feel welcome in our church, and we believe that he will receive the Word of God -- they both will -- and so, in time, the Word of God will convict them." I pleaded with him -- "We don't have that kind of time. His wife needs him at home. His kids need him at home. Can you help me?" Justice? I'll let you decide.

In 1970, the transfusions began. In 1986, they stopped. During that time, 16 years, half of all hemophiliacs in the United States were infected with contaminated blood, and they received HIV. Thousands received HIV in the United States. They estimate tens of thousands around the world. Tragically, these companies knew that they had contaminated blood. Justice? Oh, there's lawsuits. Some of the lawsuits are still pending today, though it was 1970 to 1986. Millions of dollars have been paid out. Problem is, millions of dollars doesn't bring back dead people. Today, there is so much rage and emotion going on, and people are angry -- so angry. And oftentimes we don't know what to do with that anger. Faith knows how to express anger and injustice. It was Asaph who once again is teaching us as the church what to do. If you have rage and anger, whether you read about Seattle, or you're a person of color, or you are a person who feels people of color have been treated unfairly -- you're struggling today with your emotions. And you're not sure what to do. Or, you are scared to death to speak. I was talking with Tyler this week -- my son -- and he was commenting on two pastors who -- this week, two pastors of really large churches -- Andy Stanley, Matt Chandler -- who both said, and I paraphrase their statements, that they have never been so afraid to speak as they are right now. Both pastors of large -- I think, somewhere in the vicinity of 10,000-plus churches. It's like we went to bed and woke up in a world where we're scared -- scared of each other. We go to the grocery store and we look at each other, and we're kind of like -- "I know I don't have leprosy, and you probably don't have leprosy, but you think I have leprosy, and so, I'm supposed to be afraid of you." And then we go and we're supposed to be -- we look at folks, and we're afraid, and then we look at the news and we're angry! And we don't know what to do with that rage. And then we read about injustice, about this woman who serves -- she actually served 15 of the 30 years, and the guy who got only two years for doing the abuse -- and you're, like, "God, where are you?"

See, that was Asaph's question. That was Asaph's question, as he was writing on behalf of the nation of Israel, when the Babylonians came in, and they'd ransacked the place, and they'd destroyed the temple, and -- he was writing, and the nation was struggling with their anger. It's almost like as if you'd just driven through Seattle, and you looked at Seattle and you remembered the days when you used to be able to take your children there, and you remember the days when you used to drive to Seattle and go see a Mariners' game, and you used to go up there and go down to Pike Place, and you used to go up there and watch the Seahawks, and you used to like Seattle and think it was safe -- and now you think, Seattle reminds me of Venezuela. And now the idea of Seattle is like

going into Columbia. And you're angry. And you don't know what to do with it. Asaph teaches you. And he says that faith knows how to acknowledge the crime or the injustice. It does. Faith doesn't deny it. Faith doesn't gloss over it. Faith doesn't excuse it. "God, the nations have invaded your inheritance!" God, the nations have gone crazy! God, the nation has gone nuts! We have disrespected law! We are turning over police cars, we have turned our anger into a vengeful, angry, absolutely uncontrollable rage. The reality is, Asaph teaches us it's time to speak. Faith doesn't go silent. It's okay to speak the injustices. It's okay to speak the pain. He says, "They have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to birds of the air." Mothers were hysterically crying for lost children.

I've more than a few times thought, You know, I think I can make it out of this world. I'm 58. You know what? I had a few early hard years. I got 20, 30 years -- I think I can make it before it gets really weird. However, it's gotten really weird in the last three months, maybe I can't. I'm really troubled for my grandkids. But I think I can make it. But these moms were hysterical for their kids. But faith doesn't deny the crime. In fact, not only can faith acknowledge it, but faith can take the next step, and that is -- faith can acknowledge the tragedy of the salt in the wound. "We're objects" -- verse four -- "we're objects of reproach to our neighbors. Of scorn and derision to those around us." You see, the UN doesn't show up. Doctors Without Borders aren't walking through Jerusalem. Who's walking through Jerusalem? The voyeurs from other nations who are coming through, and they're scouring through the rubble, and they're taking tours through the temple, and they're asking for guided tours -- "Hey, can you take me, and take me around the temple where you used to sacrifice? Can you take me where the holy of holies used to be? Can you show me around?" A number of years ago, Kerri and I did a wedding down in Louisiana -- down in New Orleans. And we were down there with a dear friend of ours that grew up in the area, and she took us on a guided tour. She put us in her van, and she just drove us around. And it was kind of sad, but she drove us around all of the area after Katrina and just showed us all of the horrible, horrible destruction. Well, that was the destruction that came about because of all the flooding. This was destruction that came about because of the barbarian work of the Babylonians. But my friends, these people weren't there as humanitarians. They were there as gloaters. They were there as braggarts. They were there as celebrants. They were there excited. They were there -- like, I was listening to an interviewer this week, when they were interviewing this woman -- she's actually an elected official -- who was being asked how she felt about what was happening in Seattle, and she was celebrating it! She was excited about it! She thought it was a good thing! And you can imagine how this felt to Asaph and to the nation of Israel. Faith not only acknowledges the injustice, but it also strengthens you and enables you to handle the challenge of the voyeurs, but it will also give you the ability to overcome the temptation to defend or to excuse God. And what do I mean by that? I mean this -- if you're gonna give God credit for the victories, then don't let God off the hook for the suffering.

You see, that's why Asaph lands this whole thing right at God's feet. "God, it's on your watch that the Babylonians came in and destroyed your temple, and I lay it at your feet." What do you do with your anger? What do you do with your frustration? What do you do with your anguish? Christians are marvelously, beautifully present with their praise at the feet of God, and oftentimes we're pathetic at our willingness to excuse God at our suffering. In fact, what we have often done -- not conservatives, but actually liberals -- what we will do is, we will excuse God and we'll create whole theological systems. It's called "open theism." What is open theism? It's the creation of a theological system whereby we can excuse God and get Him off of the hook for suffering! What's open theism? It's the belief that God doesn't know the future, so thereby He's not accountable for it. Well, that's wonderful! Well, God surely didn't know this was going to happen, so how can we ever hold God accountable for it? Oh, that's marvelous! So, God is somehow marvelously, brilliantly

limited. Well, that's wonderful. So God, you're sovereign, but not quite. You're almighty, but not quite almighty. You're omniscient, but well, you have just a little bit of knowledge that you don't know.

The fact is -- Asaph is consistent. "God, you're sovereign. You're almighty. You're glorious. You're beautiful. And this is your mess! It's yours! I hold you accountable for dealing with this! I don't blame you --" He's not suggesting for a moment that God is the source of evil. Listen to me carefully. He's not suggesting, "You're the cause of the Babylonians" -- he is simply saying, "God, it's on your watch that the Babylonians came in and routed your temple. This is your temple. This is your name. These are your people. God, you deal with this."

What do you do with the injustice? Faith acknowledges it, and faith is willing to express our needs. What are they? There are three needs that this text is going to tell you that you have. Number one, you have a need for justice. You absolutely have a need for justice. If we do not have a need for justice, then we are in serious trouble. But if we have a need for justice, then, my friend, we are also going to have a need for mercy. And if we have a need for mercy, then we are going to have a need for vindication. All three of these are in this text. Verses five and six tell us as we begin in this text, "God, will you let me see justice? Will you let me see justice?" It's similar to what Jeremiah says in chapter 10, verse 25 -- "Will you pour out your wrath on the nation that does not acknowledge you?" He says here, "How long, oh Lord, will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire? I want you to pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name, for they have devoured Jacob and destroyed his homeland." That's exactly the prayer of Jeremiah. Asaph has been reading Jeremiah, and Jeremiah probably has been spending time with Asaph. And they have been spending time with each other, and they're asking exactly the same question -- "God, what do you do with people who ultimately reject you? Pour out your wrath on them!"

Now -- here's a question that I want to wrestle with you. Can a Christian pray that prayer? Should you pray that prayer? Is that a good prayer to pray, or should you be a little kinder and pray a prayer of, "Oh God, please forgive them -- bring them to their right mind. Oh, Lord" -- in fact, shouldn't you be a little nicer? Shouldn't you be a little kinder? Should you pray these kinds of prayers? Or is this a prayer in the Old Testament when you get into the New Testament, is God a little kinder and a little, well, friendlier? For those of you who have studied the Scripture, I think you would probably suggest -- I think -- and I hope you would -- that the God of the New Testament is the same God of the Old Testament, and so, that would make no sense that somehow, as one theological framework says, the God of the Old Testament is an adolescent God and He has matured and grown up and got kinder in the New Testament. I hope you don't believe that. I hope you believe that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. And so, whatever Asaph teaches us, and whatever he reveals to us, is a prayer that he can pray in the Old Testament, and it is one that we can pray in the New Testament. Can I pray this prayer? "God -- bring your justice to those who do not call upon your name, who do not acknowledge you." Oh, yes. In fact, what does God say? "Vengeance is mine." In fact, what does He ask us to do? Get vengeance out of your hand, because you cannot handle it. Vengeance is not good for me. Retribution is not good for me. Anger and rage are not good for me. They are poisonous to my soul. That's why the prayer of justice is so important. "God, you get justice. You seek justice. God, you be the one who brings your wrath against people. If I do it, it will destroy me. If I am the one who seeks your justice, if I am the one who seeks vengeance, if I am the one who seeks to bring the wrath of God, if I am the one who envisions the wrath of God -- oh, Lord, it will so poison my soul I will hate people! But God, what I can

do is release these barbarians to you. God, those who will shake your fist at you, who will never bow their knee to you -- bring them to an end."

I remember -- I think I've shared it with you before. I remember as a kid, it was a Sunday night, I'll never forget it. Sunday night services in our church when I was growing up weren't all that exciting, but I remember one Sunday night I'll never forget. I mean, it was like lightning struck my head, and my dear friend Virgil was praying, and I'll never forget, he was praying for the Supreme Court Justice, and he said, "Dear God, either take them out or save them! I don't care! But they are killing children!" And I looked over, and I thought, "Dear God, I think he prayed for you to kill them!" Or save them. That was kind of his kindness. See -- when your heart is raging, it is a good thing to pray for justice. Why? Because you're releasing it to the Father. And you're saying, "Vengeance is yours. The wrath is yours." And dear friend, God's justice is just, and it always fits the crime, never more, never less. And it does reflect God's heart. And you and I both know that to live in a world without justice is to live in a world that none of us want to live in. God, will you let us see justice? But also, God, will you let us experience mercy? "Do not hold against us" -- verse eight, it says -- "the sins of the fathers. May your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need." On what grounds? On what grounds do we ever have in this moment to ask for mercy? On what grounds? Verse nine tells us. "Help us, oh God, our Savior, for the glory of your name deliver us and forgive our sins. For your name's sake."

When they would bring the animal in that they were going to sacrifice, the priest would lay his hands on the animal. Why would they do that? He would symbolically lay his hands on the sheep. He would symbolically lay his hands on the dove. Whatever animal he was sacrificing. And it wasn't to control the animal. There would be a person there to take the life of the animal. But the priest was laying his hands on the animal, why? Because it was a symbolic gesture of what? The imputation of our sins upon the animal, that the animal would take the sins. A picture of what? Imputing our sins to the animal. What's the basis? God, it's your name. It's your covenant. It's your covenant, it's your name that we're asking for mercy. It's not us. It's you. It's your glory. It's you that we're pleading for, it's not because of our greatness. We are coming to you because of your name. When we get baptized here, we go down into the water and we come up, and why do we do that? Because we're identifying with the glory of Christ. We're taking our life, and we're reaching back into the story of Christ, and in that moment we're taking our life and we're connecting it to the story of what happened two thousand years ago, and we're saying that what Jesus did two thousand years ago reaches into my life. Have mercy on me, Jesus. And it's not that in that moment that's when the mercy comes. We're just symbolically saying that, my friends, that's why I ask for mercy, is because of the work of Christ that He gave to us. Have mercy on me. We were baptized. We were baptized because Christ died for us. Christ gave us His life. So, I ask you a question today. As you're angry, as you're seeking justice -- what is your greatest concern? What's my greatest concern? What's Asaph's greatest concern? Do you notice -- and there's going to be a transition again -- do you notice it? He starts off with this crime, this injustice, this rage. "God, I'm sick of what's happening! I'm sick of these voyeurs, these sick individuals who are coming and mocking us! Your temple! I want justice, God! But God, I also need mercy." Because it seems whenever I demand justice of someone else's sin, it seems the Holy Spirit naturally draws attention to me. I need mercy. And it seems like whenever I feel an obsession to look at my frustration with others, I begin to see a speck in my own eye. And the Lord says, "Have mercy. Have mercy." Faith expresses a need. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of Christ. And when I cry out for justice, I cry out for mercy. And I realize that the anger of vengeance is oftentimes a person who claims to be judge when only God really is.

There's a final need, and it's the need for vindication. Verse 10 says, "Why should the nations say, 'where is their God?' May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm, preserve those condemned to die. Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach that they have hurled at you, oh Lord." Where does Asaph finish? As do often the psalmists, what begins as a personal affront to them begins or ends as a personal affront to God. Vindication is universal. It is. And whenever we are personally affronted or somebody affronts us, it is not an uncommon thing to want to have somebody come back and say, "I was wrong about you," or, "I'm sorry, and I've got to get it right." That is a universal thing. But what Asaph notices is that God, what I must most deeply care about is that what this nation is getting wrong is you. What we have gotten wrong is that we no longer trust the message that's on our currency, "In God We Trust." The rage that we're seeing on the street, it's because there's no deep respect for God anymore. The demands that we're giving -- a free education, and doctors that must give us service, police that must give us this -- is probably more likely, not because of systemic racism, it's because there's no interest in surrendering our hearts to God. The vindication that we must all really pray for is what Asaph prays for -- "The reproach that they have hurled, God, is at you." Let's be honest. Let's be honest with each other just for a moment. We love to be accepted. We love it when people think that we are important. When we're a church for the city, and people think, "Wow, we need you as a church, and You're important to us, and You serve a vital role to our city," and -- people come and they talk about the importance of our church. We love that! But let's be honest. I don't think when they find out our views on gender that they're going to be really excited. And I don't think that the future of the church, the one that believes in the Scriptures, is going to be defined as accepted and loved and appreciated. In our progressive state, don't be offended that the city may not love us all that much. Be offended that they reject God. Be offended that they reject Christ. Because that's what matters. That's what broke Asaph's heart. Not that they offended or that they rejected him. It's that -- God, that they hurled insults at you! That they rejected you! That they despised you!

One of the dangers is that we take this whole thing so personal when, at the core of it is, can we become concerned about the reputation and the name of Christ? Faith expresses a need. God, will you bring me vindication? But it's not really me -- it's You. Faith always praises God. Verse 13, NIV -- I normally love NIV, I'm not sure really they got this one right, because it says: "Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever." It's probably really "but" -- it's not "then" as if something else will happen, but the reality is, no matter what happens, we will praise you forever. "From generation to generation we will recount your praise." In other words, God -- it doesn't depend on when you bring justice. We won't wait for that. We will praise you. We won't wait to praise you until you get it right. We won't wait to praise you until our governor gives you the green light. We'll praise you tonight, we'll praise you tomorrow. We won't wait until the band is all together and we can hear it. We will praise you from our house, we will praise you from our front yard. We won't wait until it's all perfect. We will praise you from generation to generation. Because we refuse to wait. Why? Because faith hopes God will set all things right, punishing and showing mercy through His divine justice. But faith hopes. And faith acts. It does -- faith acts.

Got a letter this week from a friend -- dear, dear friend. I've known him since -- gosh, he was -- oh, I don't know, maybe eight or nine. I've known him since his first liver transplant. He's on his third. His letter came, his note, that just -- that his liver is failing. And he doesn't have much time left. The average liver transplant of his disease is ten years. He's had it 28 years, his liver, this one. And so, by all standards, he's broken ever record in the world, but -- you know, when you've lived 28 years with this liver and you have a precious wife, you don't look at it saying, "Hey, I've lived 28 years, the average is 10 years, I should be thankful." You've lived 28 years with this liver and you want to live

more. But I was looking at his note. And as he was reflecting -- "My liver is in its final days. What do you do with your last year? I guess I should ask, 'What do I do when I feel good?' Most days I don't. On days that I feel good, I think I will continue to do art to the best of my ability. I will cook fabulous meals. I will write in a way that reflects the beauty and the glory of Christ. And I will do everything I can to be a great follower of Jesus. And however long He gives me, I will praise Him. And I will give Him every day my best." I was reflecting on Ben's words. I wouldn't use the term "justice" -- is it fair? Is it fair? Such a precious guy. His wife Cherish -- what a wonderful young lady. He has every right in many ways to be mad and feel cheated. But he's not. He's taking every day living with it as best he can. Faith hopes. It's not willing to lie about injustice or suffering. It says honestly, my liver is in its final days. Seattle is a mess. Our world is a disaster. The injustice of our world is horrible. The chaos is bad. The disrespect is horrible. The 600 police officers who have been injured or killed since the tragedy of Floyd's death is nothing short of tragic. But faith hopes. Why? Because Jesus Christ, who is King -- He will give us justice. And He will bring us mercy. And we ask, God, vindicate your name, because your name is great.

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