

# GODS ON THE GROUND

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## Psalms

Psalm 82 // Craig Smith

July 22, 2018

**Craig //** Welcome to all of our campuses. So glad you are here for week number two for our interlude in the Book of Psalms. I will be honest with you, I picked the Psalm we are going to look at today because I have never understood it. I have read it many times over the years, and I have put it off to the side like I don't really know what that means. Maybe someday. I decided, this is the day. I was really going to push in and through prayer and study come to understand what God was saying, and I was incredibly encouraged by both some really powerful things about what God says he does for us, but also really challenged by high callings he places on our lives. I'm really excited to share that with you, so if you want to grab your Bible, make your way to Psalm 82, I'm really excited to see what God has for us this morning.

Psalm 82 starts with a quick little editorial note. It says a Psalm of Asaph. That's not the important part we are going to talk about. It either means it was written by a guy named Asaph or it was the name of a community of worship leaders there at the temple in Jerusalem. It's verse 1 where things start to get weighty. Verse 1 says God presides in the great assembly. He renders judgment among the "gods." That is the key verse because if we understand what he's saying there, everything else in the Psalm will make sense, and if we misunderstand it, almost nothing else in the Psalm really is going to make any sense. We need to push in and go, what exactly is He saying?

He says that He presides in, or He has authority over an assembly. The assembly specifically, it's an assembly of gods. The question is, what is that? What is this assembly of the gods? There are two options. One option is that it's the foreign gods of all of the different nations. So it's the Greek gods and the Babylonian gods and the Assyrian, so God is sort of in judgment over this big council of all of the gods of the nations. The other option is that He's actually talking about His people, that this is the assembly of God's people. As strange as it may sound, as I really pushed into it, I came to the pretty firm conclusion that, that's actually what He's saying. This is an assembly of God's people He's presiding over and passing judgment on. Let me give you four quick reasons why I say that. I know it's a little bit of an odd thing.

The first reason I say that is that the Hebrew word for assembly that's used here, the Hebrew word for assembly almost always refers to the people of Israel. We find this particular word used 200 times in the Old Testament and the vast majority of them, only a handful of exceptions are referring to the assembly or the coming together of God's people, the Israelites, or Jewish people. The second reason I say that this is God's people that He's presiding over is that the Psalm itself, a little bit further on says that the gods are sons of the Most High. If you want to skim down to verse 6, it says, I said you are gods, you are all sons of the Most High. That language, that being sons or children of God is actually language that's used many, many times throughout the Bible to refer to God's people. In fact, one quick example, Deuteronomy 14:1 God says, you are all sons of the Lord your God. That's a reference to the people of Israel, so to God's people.

Third reason I say that is because Jesus himself quoted the Psalm. Did you know that? Jesus quoted the Psalm, and in John 10:34 he quotes the Psalm, and he says a very interesting thing. He says this, John 10:34. Jesus answered them, is it not written in your Law I have said you are "gods"? That's a direct quote of Psalm 82. Then he says, he called them Gods to whom the Word of God came, who received the Word of God? It was the people of Israel. People of Israel are the ones who received the Word of God. Jesus says, if he called them "gods" who received the Word of God, He's talking about the people of God, He's talking about Israel.

And the fourth reason I say that is simply because everything that happens in the Psalm is a judgment, and the judgment God make in the Psalm is based on commandments that He gave to Israel. Everything He says, you should be doing this, it's commandments He gave to Israel in the Law. Every time He says you are not doing something, they are failing to do something that was a commandment given to the Nation of Israel. So for all of those reasons, as odd as the language is, I believe what God is dealing with from the very beginning, He is saying, I'm presiding over the assembly of My people, and that originally was the Nation of Israel, but as followers of Jesus, we are by extension the people of God, so He's speaking to us.

He says He presides over the great assembly of My people, and He passes judgment. What we need to understand is, this Psalm is a judgment against us. It's a judgment against God's people for failing to live out His priorities. That's what we are going to see. It's a judgment against His people for failing to live out His priorities. And of course, the natural question at this point is, okay, that's fine, but why on Earth would He call us gods? Anyone else uncomfortable with that? I am. Because if you spend any time in church, you hear people say, you're not God. God is God, and you are not. Even though we try to be God or we try to take control of our own lives, or we would love to crawl up on His throne and sort of be in charge of everything. We are trying to be gods and we call that sin, and we should, so how on Earth are we supposed to deal with the fact that here He seems to call His people gods?

What is happening? One of the things to understand is that this is a Psalm. It's poetry, and here's the thing, when we are reading poetry, we look for big ideas, not technical precision. Does that make sense? When we are reading poetry, we look for big ideas, not technical -- we don't get caught up in nuances of particular words. For instance, if I quoted that very, very famous piece of poetry, if I said, I think that I shall never see, a poem lovely as a -- tree. I mean, think about that line. I think that I should ever see a poem -- nobody ever stops the person at that point and goes, duh. You are never going to see a poem lovely as a tree because you don't see poems, you idiot. Poems are words. We don't see words. We hear words. What's wrong with you. We don't do that because we understand, we don't get caught up in the nuance of those words. And so in way, it's the big idea. The big idea is that I can't write a piece of poetry as beautiful as any tree that God created. Nothing we create can hold a candle -- that's the idea. We don't get caught up in the nuances of these word, so in the same way, the big idea here is not that we are gods in the same sense that God is, not that we are eternal or that we should be on His throne or that we should take His place in heaven.

The big idea is this that in some way we are supposed to be acting as God's people on Earth, we are supposed to be about His business on Earth. In some way we are supposed to be living out His priorities on Earth, and the question is then, what are those priorities? In verse 2 He begins to give us a clue on that. Verse 2 says how long will you defend the unjust, and how long will you show partiality to the wicked? This is really the heart of the Psalm. This is the heart of the judgment that is being rendered. What He's saying to His people, you are not like Me. You are not acting like Me. You are not living out My priorities. Instead of that, what you are doing, you are showing partiality to wicked people. You are defending the unjust.

In both of these cases, the underlying assumption, these are not poor and powerless rich people, these are rich and powerful rich and wicked people, in other words, people that can help you. People it makes sense to get on their good side because they can help you. You want to stay off their bad side because they can hurt you. He says that's what you are doing. You are looking out for your own interests, and because of that, you are defending unjust people. You are looking at people who are doing terrible things and you are going, okay, I know that wasn't ideal, but look at the good that could come if he continues on having power. Maybe he would get to a place where we would really benefit. Let's not give him too hard of a time. Yeah, I know it's not ideal. You know, we say things like, you have to break a few eggs to make an omelet, right? Right? Which is fine as long as you are not the egg, right? As long as I'm not the one getting broken to accomplish something that I think is useful, then it's okay, but apparently, we are willing -- okay, yeah, he's hurting those people, and he's being unjust to those people, but I'm going to benefit in some way, so I'm defending him.

I don't know what you guys think about the "me too" movement, but one of the most horrifying thing to me to come out of that are some stories, several stories of pastors of large churches who abused women at some point in their ministry, and the leadership of the church knew about it, and the leadership said, yeah, but if that goes public, if anybody finds out that happened, all of the good we are doing in the community, all of the positive things we have done will go away, and we don't want that to happen, so we are going to cover it up, and it's happened. It's happened in several of our churches. We say things like, you know, well the end justifies the means, right? No, they don't. The ends don't justify the means. Sweeping evil under the carpet just because you think there's some good we are protecting or some benefit we are going to have later, no, that's not okay. As God's people, He says why are you still doing that? Stop it.

You are showing partiality to the wicked. You are looking at rich people and you are going, they can help me, so I'm going to give them preferential treatment. It sounds remarkably like something the early church struggle with in the Book of James writing to the church he says, verse 3, chapter 2, if you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say here is a good seat for you, but you say to the poor man, you stand there or sit on the floor by my feet, have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Then he goes on to say, these are the same rich people that are persecuting you. These are the same wealthy people that are oppressing you. They are doing terrible things, and you hate that they are doing them, but they walk into your worship service and you say, I need to get on his good side. Here's the best seat in the house, and then the poor person who has nothing to offer you, you are like, why don't you just sit over there, sit at my feet, and if I get really tired, I'm just going to prop my feet up on you, don't worry about that.

It's degrading. It's demeaning, but who cares? They can't help me. They can't hurt me. They got nothing to offer me, but these people --

God says, that's not Me. And it shouldn't be My people. Instead He says, listen -- understand my heartbeat on this. God hates it. He hates it when we compromise with evil people just because they can help us. God hates it when we compromise with evil people just because they can help us, and we can spend a lot of time talking through examples of how we do this because I think every one of us is tempted on an almost daily basis to do something like this, but I believe that as believers and followers of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in you, and you are capable of listening to Him and being led by Him, so I want to challenge you to ask yourself this question this week, where am I most tempted to do this? Where am I most tempted to compromise with evil people because I think they can help me?

Ask yourself that question this week. We need to identify that so we can resist it, and instead, verse 3 He says this, this is what I want you to do. Defend the weak and the fatherless. Not the unjust. Defend the weak and the fatherless. Uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy, deliver them from the hand of the wicked. That's what you should be doing, He says. It's really interesting, the temptation to help to defend, show partiality to the wicked rich over here is because they can help me, right? Whereas these people, the weak, the orphan, the weak, the needy, the poor, the oppressed, they don't have anything to offer me. If I help them, I'm not going to see any return from it. If they had anything to offer me, they probably wouldn't need my help in the first place, right? But God says, yeah, that's who I want you

helping. I want you to help the helpless.

I grew up in a Christian home. I'm so grateful for that. I was taught the Bible from a very young age. I was also taught some additional stuff that I thought was in the Bible because I thought it sounded Bible-ee. But in my older life, I have realized, that's not actually in there. One of the things that I heard, I wonder how many of you have heard this one is, God helps those who -- help themselves.

Yeah, yeah, you have heard it too. I honestly thought that was a Bible teaching, and then I started looking. I thought, I must have a broken Bible because I cannot find that. Maybe it's a new translation. Something's going on. But what I have come to understand is, it's not in there, and not only is it not in there, it's a lie. It's a lie from the pit of hell, because listen to me, God doesn't help those help themselves. God helps the helpless, and those who cry out to Him in their helplessness. That's my God. That's your God. He helps those that are unable to help themselves and then admit that and say God, will you do for me what I can't do? That's the heart of the Gospel message, right? That while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That while we were still trying to earn our way into heaven, trying to overcome our sin and the deficit and the weight of it, Jesus said, you can't, but it's okay. I love you so much, I'm coming to you. I will rescue you.

He sent His own Son who died on the cross, took the burden of our sin, set us free from it, and just by accepting His free gift of life, we are brought into a relationship with Him and have eternal life in heaven. We couldn't get there on our own, but that's our God. He doesn't help those who help themselves. He helps those who are unable to help themselves and cry out to Him in their helplessness. Having given us this grace and mercy, this incredible new gift of life in Christ, He doesn't expect us to work it off after the fact. He doesn't expect us to pay Him back, but, and this is really important to understand, God doesn't expect us to pay Him back, but He does expect us to pay it forward. Do you know what I mean? We can't. We could never work off the debt that Jesus paid for us. We could never get there.

He doesn't expect us to pay it off, but He does expect us to pay it forward. He does expect us to do in some small way for others what He has done for us. To love those who cannot help us back. To pour into and pour out for those who really, honestly, they have nothing to offer in return, but in the process of doing that, we are acting just like our God. Unfortunately the people of God can so easily forget this, so verse 5 says the "gods" know nothing. My people know nothing. They understand nothing. They walk about in darkness, and all the foundations of the Earth are shaken. He says, My people, they don't get it. They have been saved by grace but when they look at others, it's always, what can you do for me? Yeah, I'll help you out, but I expect something in return. If you don't have anything, then you are kind of off my radar. I don't have much to offer for you, then. Because the people that come into the light, they are not seeing by the same light.

They are not looking at the world the way I do. They are not living out My priorities. He says because of that, the very foundations of the Earth are shaken. The world, it's in danger. It's so interesting to me, I hear Christians say it all the time. They go, hey, everything is falling apart, right? Everything's going downhill. We are going to hell in a hand basket. I have no idea why a hand basket is involved, but that's the way we say it, right? And it's interesting to me, sometimes I push into it. Why do you say that? What I hear regularly, look at all of those non-Christians. They are not living by Biblical standards. They are not living by God's principles. I'm like, that's weird. Do you know what we call it when nonbelievers fail to live by God's standards, do you know what we call that? We call that normal, right? It's always been that way from the very beginning. Nonbelievers don't live by God's standards.

We don't expect the people who are not God's people to live according to the priorities of God. That's the way it's always been, and the world is in no danger because of that, however, God says, when My people fail to live out My priorities, now things get scary. That's when things really start to get shaky. That's when the world starts to crumble. The world starts crumbling when the people of God fail to live out the priorities of God. That's when things are dangerous. When God looks at nonbelievers failing to live by His standards, what He sees are helpless people in need of rescue by grace. But when He sees His people who have been rescued by grace, refusing to live out His priorities, especially when it comes to the helpless, then He says, now things are on thin ice, and so He reminds us.

Verse 82:6, I said you were "gods". You are all sons of the Most High, and while there may be some sarcasm about calling His people gods up to this point because they are sort of like, you are supposed to be little "gods" sort of, but honestly, you are not like Me at all. Here, there is no real sarcasm. Here there is just this incredible statement of potential. He said I said you are gods because you are sons of the Most High. In other words, one of the most astounding teachings in all of scripture is that when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, when we receive His mercy and forgiveness just by accepting His gift, we don't just get forgiven of our sins. Like that would be plenty all by itself, but we don't just get forgiven of our sins, we actually get adopted into the very family of God, right?

We become sons and daughters of the King of Kings, we become kings and queens of the Emperor. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, do you understand that about yourself? You are a son or a daughter of the King himself. And as a son or daughter of the King, He expects us to be about His business, to live out His priorities, and the thing is, we are not servants following orders anymore. We are not servants following orders; we are children living out our Father's priorities. That's a big difference. We are called to do the family business, to treat others in the same way that we were treated. The very thing that made us the people of God was His willingness to help those who were helpless, and He says, be about My business. I expect you to be living out the same priorities.

He gives us this warning, verse 7, He says, but you will die like mere mortals. You will fall like every other ruler. Understand, that's not a threat. He's not saying if you don't do this, I'm going to zap you. It's just a reminder of the inevitability of death. He says, you are not mere mortals

anymore. If you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you have been saved and forgiven. You are not mere mortals anymore, but you are still going to die like every other human being. He says, you are sons and daughters. You are queens and kings of the Most High, but you are going to die like every other ruler. And why remind us of the inevitability of death? He says rise up, oh God, judge the Earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.

He says, listen, the God who helps the helpless, is also the God who judges the way that we live our lives, and whether or not we have lived out His priority as His children. And I don't want to get lost in theology, but I think it's probably important to understand this, the Bible teaches two separate judgments after death. Two very distinct ones. The first one, the most important one is a judgment unto salvation. It's a judgment where God determines whether or not we spend eternity with Him or apart from Him. And that judgment is based 100% on whether or not we received the free gift of salvation that Jesus offers us. He's going to line us all up, and we are all going to get the same judgment. He's going to look at every one of us and He's going to go, sinner, sinner, sinner.

You are all sinners. None of you deserve heaven. None of you are good enough, but -- forgiven. You accepted the gift. You are saved, made clean by the blood of Jesus. That's the first judgment. It's entirely based on whether or not we have trusted in the gift of life that Jesus paid for on the cross, but there's a second judgment. It's a judgment not to salvation. That's entirely based in faith in Jesus, but it's a judgment of how we have lived our lives, whether or not we have lived out God's priorities on Earth. In II Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul, he's writing to a group of believers. Their salvation is secure. Their sins are forgiven. Their eternity is settled, but he says this, and so we make it our goal to please Him, to please God. Whether we are at home in the body or away from it, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

He is writing to believers, but he says, the way we live is going to be evaluated, and we don't know exactly what that's going to look like. Some people believe that it means an eternal experience of different levels of reward, different levels of heaven, and I can see Biblical argument for that, but other people think on the basis of other Biblical text that it's going to be more of a temporary kind of a thing, like an award ceremony, so to speak, that some of us get more applause than others, entirely based on whether or not we have lived out His priorities on Earth.

Again, it's not to salvation, but there is some kind of reward kind of a thing, and honestly, I'm not sure which one it is. I have been studying for 25 years, now, and I'm not quite sure, but honestly, it doesn't matter. The important thing is that either way, the essential truth is this, our lives are going to be evaluated. As the people of God, we are expected to live out the priorities of God, and we are going to be evaluated on whether or not we have done it, whether or not we have been about our Father's business, and that's really, it's really what this Psalm is all about, right? God calls His children to live out His priorities. God calls His children to live out His priorities. Now, obviously, there are more priorities than just this one, than helping the helpless, but apparently this is a big deal to God. It's such a big deal that He uses expansive language, and apparently, what happens is, when we do that, when we help those that are unable to help themselves, God looks at us and goes, yes! That's My girl! Right there! That's my girl! Oh, that's My boy! Yes, yes, yes. They are chips off the old block. They are like gods on the ground.

They are about My business. They are doing what I did for them. They are helping the helpless. That's -- that's My kids. So what do you do? When you see helplessness, help. That's it. We are done. When you see helplessness, help. And when you do, you are living out the very priorities of God. You are showing to the world the very same thing that brought you into a relationship in the first place. When you see helplessness, help. Maybe it's standing up for the kid who is being bullied at school, or online, maybe it's reaching out to someone that just looks lost. Maybe it's finding the -- or watching that single mom who is struggling with kids in tow. She's juggling with stuff. She clearly doesn't even know where to go at church and so you go, hey, can I help you carry something? Can I help get you to the kid's ministry to get you checked in?

Maybe, and I know this sounds simple, but it's one of the first places we start. You know, at Mission Hills on our campuses, almost every single week we see families come in, four or five, and they are looking around for seats, and they can't find four or five seats. And if you see families doing that, you know, you get up, and you move over, and you free up some seats. And I know that sounds really simple, but in that very small moment when you are going, you are helpless to do this, but I can help, you are actually living out His priorities. Mom, you live out His priorities every single day, helping the helpless. Dads, you do the same thing. Maybe it's that you take the guy at the exit ramp, you take him a sandwich and a gift card to get some food. Maybe you carry protein bars, keep them in your car so you can hand them out when the opportunity presents itself.

Maybe you volunteer at something like the Denver Rescue Mission or the Littleton Life Center where people come together to use their time, their talent, their money, their skills and all those kinds of things to help those in need of it, to help the helpless, but understand when you do that, you are beginning to live out the priorities of God. We don't earn our way into heaven by this, but we pay it forward in some way. What God has done for us, we do for others. You see, God calls His people to live out His priorities, and one of His highest priorities is helping those who are helpless.

Church, would you just respond to this message with me, would you pray with me, and all of those who are followers of Jesus, would you just pray this with me? Say, Father, thank you for helping us when we were helpless. It was more than enough that you forgave our sins, but you also adopted us into Your family and You made us Your sons and daughters, and You invite us and enable us through the power of Your Holy Spirit to be about the family business, to live out Your priorities. Thank you. Now at all of our campuses, some of us are realizing at this moment that, we are children of God. We have received the gift of life by faith and adoption into family, but we are not living out His priorities in this area where we were supposed to be. Maybe some of us are feeling conviction that we have had opportunities to help, and we have convinced ourselves that,

I'm too busy, or I don't have the resources or it's uncomfortable, or whatever it is. We haven't helped those that are unable to help themselves even though we have had the opportunity.

Some of us are maybe even realizing that it goes so far as we have defended the unjust and the wicked because we thought in some way their agenda would benefit us. We need to course correct. If you are feeling some conviction by the Holy Spirit in that area, would you raise your hand? My hand's going up for sure. Would you just raise your hand with me? If you are online, click that button right below me. If you are on Facebook live say my hand's up in the comment line, and let's pray. Father, I have not always lived out Your priority to help the helpless, and I'm sorry. I have missed some opportunities. I'm sorry I missed them. Maybe I have even defended the unjust because I thought it would help me in some way, and I'm sorry. I repent. I turn away from that stuff. Holy Spirit, I ask you to give me renewed vision for my opportunities, to do for others what You have done for me.

Give me the courage and the boldness to help those that are unable to help themselves, and to be about my Father's business, Amen. I just ask you to continue in an attitude of prayer, if you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, would you just begin praying right now for people around you who may not know Jesus including those that are online watching from all over the world, because on all of our campuses I believe right now, right now there are some people that are realizing that they are helpless for the first time. Maybe that's you. You are realizing you have spent your whole life trying to earn God's favor, get the balance sheet right so that you would be worthy of it, and for the first time you are realizing you are absolutely helpless in what matters most, and that's a great place to be because it's in that moment of helplessness that we can cry out and take hold on the promise of God that if we put our trust in Jesus, if we call upon His name, He will not only forgive our sins, but He will adopt us as His very sons and daughters.

So if you are ready to give your life to Jesus right now, to accept His free gift of life, to be adopted as His son, if you are ready for that right now, would you just slip your hand up wherever you are. That's awesome. I see several hands. That's fantastic. Online, just click the button right below me. Facebook live, just type in, I'm ready to say, yes. Wherever you are right now, let's just say this to Him, say this in your heart, say, Father, I have done wrong. I'm never going to be good enough, but I understand that I don't have to be because You sent Jesus to pay for my sin to set me free, and I'm crying out to You in my helplessness. Jesus, thank you for dying for me. Jesus, thank you for rising from the dead and offering me new life. I'm ready to receive it. So Jesus, I give you my life, and I accept new life from you. I'm now Your son or Your daughter, and I'm ready to start living out Your priorities as Your child. In Jesus name, Amen. Can we just celebrate those who came into the family of God today?

*[applause]*

That's awesome.