

Self-Sufficient

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[0 : 00] we're going to think about this idea that God is self-sufficient. But first of all, what does it mean when we talk about somebody being self-sufficient? Well, we think about the role of a parent. One of the goals, I guess, of parenting is to see children mature into adulthood so that our children can grow in independence, that they're able to stand on their own two feet.

So we talk about that as being self-sufficient. It's used of people if they are financially secure, dependent on no one else, maybe if they've got the resources required for a particular task, or if they're able to get on without help. That person is described as self-sufficient. Of course, when we say that, we're not saying that person has no lack whatsoever. We're not saying that they need nothing and need no one else. When we apply self-sufficient to people, it's always a relative term compared to God when it's absolute. And the fact is in the Bible, we discover from the earliest pages that we were in fact created to be dependent. We were created to rely on others to provide for us.

So in Genesis 1 and 2, we discover most fundamentally that we are created by God in the image of God, and it's God who provides all the conditions for human flourishing. Without him, we would not have life. We would not have the food that we need. God says, I give you every tree and every plant for food. And we also discover when God made Adam, God said, it's not good for man to be alone.

Understanding that Adam needed a helper, someone alongside him. So part of God's provision for us as dependent people is to provide a community for us. And that's a really good thing to remind ourselves of that we need our creator every day and every moment. And we also need others around us.

We're not entirely self-sufficient or independent. But by contrast, God is self-sufficient, and that's an absolute term. So we discover in the Bible that he is our creator, but we know too that he is uncreated.

[2 : 28] He has no beginning or ending. He didn't rely on somebody to create him. He is the sustainer of all things, but is himself eternally self-sustaining. He is the God who provides for us, but he needs nothing from us.

And so we have this picture of God as absolutely self-sufficient. And that's one of the realities that comes out in Psalm 50. So let's spend a little bit of time thinking together why it's good news that, to use Jen Wilkins' words, our God is self-sufficient, needed by all, and needful of nothing. Why is that good for our worship and our lives of faith? Why is that good news for us as we seek to care for others? So let's look together at Psalm 50 as we are introduced to the self-sufficient God. And right from verse 1, we are meeting God here, and we have the fullest naming of God in all of the 150 Psalms. So he's described, first of all, as the mighty one. Here is the reminder that God is the almighty creator. Here we are talking about the God who is the king of heaven, and he is God.

He is Lord over humanity. He is Lord over all of the people. And he is the Lord, and that's a capitalized Lord, reminding us that he's the covenant God over his people Israel. So here we are being presented right from the beginning with a God who is not a small God, but rather is a vast God who has Lord over his Lord. He is the almighty maker and sustainer of heaven and earth being introduced to us.

And then in the verse 1 to verse 6, we have a scene before him. So verse 1, the mighty one God, the Lord, speaks and summons the earth. Verse 4, he summons the heavens above and the earth that he may judge.

So here is all of the heavens and all of the earth, as it were, summoned into God's courtroom. Here is God the judge, and the world and the heavens are in the courtroom. And we might naturally, if we've read the Bible, we might expect this to be a time when God will judge the enemies of Israel, Israel perhaps. But what we discovered is this is a judgment in verse 4 that focuses particularly on his people Israel. He summons the heavens above and the earth that he may judge his people. And then he says in verse 5, gather to me my consecrated ones who made a covenant with me by sacrifice. So if this is the courtroom, then all eyes are turning to see how God is going to deal with Israel, this consecrated, this set apart, this holy people, God's covenant people. What is he going to say to them?

[5 : 48] And in verse 7, we discover that God has something against the people. Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you. And he has that right, because I am God, your God. And in the rest of the psalm, we see God speaking to two different types of people within the nation of Israel. In verses 7 to 15, we could call them religious Israel.

And God has something against them because they have a false picture of the God that they worship. And we'll think about that in a few moments. And so in their case, God wants to bring truth to them, to bring them to a point of repentance, to a point where they acknowledge who God really is.

And then in verse 16 to verse 21, he speaks again, this time we could say to non-religious Israel or to hypocritical Israel, perhaps, because we see that they are occasionally going through the motions of worship.

But at the same time as they're doing that, verse 17, for example, you hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. And they're engaging in all kinds of wickedness. When you see a thief, you join with him. You throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil. And significantly, in verse 21, it says, you thought I was altogether like you. Again, they seem to have a very small view of God.

As it were, they've taken God down to their level. And so in his grace and in his mercy, God wants to bring his people back to the covenant to remember that relationship that they'd entered into so that they might be called back to faithful worship once again. And part of that will be showing to this first group, in particular, this religious group, what God is truly like.

[7 : 50] So let's go back to that first group. Let's go back to religious Israel. And let's hear what God has to say as he testifies against them. In verse 8, he says, I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me.

So they're not being rebuked because they're failing to bring the sacrifices. They're always there. This is a very religious and very devout group of people.

So there's no shortage of sacrifice happening. So what's the problem? The problem, as we discover, is the heart behind their sacrificing. The problem is their misunderstanding of God. We'll look in a moment at verses 9 to 14. And what becomes clear is that they have the idea that God is dependent on them, that God is somehow needy and deficient, and their worship is going to fill God up. And so what they are doing is they are engaging in rituals when what God desires is actually relationship. And so what God does is he makes his self-sufficiency very, very clear to them. So in verse 9, I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens.

Same thing, quite simply, I don't need your sacrifices. I'm not lacking something until you show up at the altar. Verse 10, for every animal of the forest is mine and the cattle on a thousand hills.

I know every bird in the mountains and the creatures of the field are mine. What's this point there? Here is God saying, it all belongs to me anyway. Those gifts that you're giving, thinking I am lacking, you need to understand that it all belongs to me. And then verse 12 and 13, if I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is mine and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Again, God is saying, I have no lack. And even if I did, he's saying to the people, you wouldn't be able to satisfy. So he's making very clear to them the difference between God as self-sufficient and those who worship him as those who ought to depend on him.

[10 : 27] So here we have an answer to that false view of God that would say that God created people because he was lonely or because he needed something. That was the idea that Israel had there. They thought they were serving a needy God by their sacrifices. But of course, the reality that we find in the Bible is that God is his father and son and spirit and he has eternally lived in a perfect community of love and joy and relationship before the world ever was, there was perfect love. God didn't lack anything before the world was made and he doesn't lack anything when the world is made. So God does not say to people, you complete me. God doesn't have a people-shaped hole in his heart. But we should humbly say that of God.

God, you complete me. I am incomplete. I am lacking without you. So we do not worship because God needs it.

In his mercy, he gives us the opportunity to worship him and he is pleased with our worship, but he doesn't need it.

The self-sufficient God does not need us, but in his kindness, he has determined that we would be meaningful to him. Some of my favorite words in the Old Testament are from the prophet Zephaniah in chapter 3 and verse 17.

It says, The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He takes great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with loud singing.

[12 : 25] This is a God who doesn't need us, but still chooses to delight in us as his children. In a sense, this is key to understanding our personal significance, to know that we matter to this God.

But here we are presented with the self-sufficient God. Now, what implications for ourselves can we draw from these truths? First of all, we need to say it is good news that God does not need us.

Because it means God is not limited in any way whatsoever. When we think about ourselves, we can find ourselves being controlled by our needs and by our limits.

Think again about children, how often they have to say whether they like it or not, Mum, Dad, I need you. I need help with this. There's any number of things that we can't do until we grow and develop.

But that is never true of God. There is no lack. There is no development there. We find ourselves, too, as people often needing instruction or needing direction.

[13 : 36] You need to do this first and then that. You need to speak to this person. You need to go there first. But God never lacks the wisdom or the strength or the direction to act in perfect ways in all that he does.

We discover, too, that sometimes our needs as people will drive us negatively. We can become so focused on them to the detriment of other people and other things.

We can think about the power of addictions in a person's life that reflects that. But God, remember, has no lack. Therefore, he has no negative driving forces.

And again, when we give help to someone, quite often the response might be, I owe you one. There's that idea of reciprocating. But God never needs anyone to help him out.

Therefore, God is never in our debt. Because God is self-sufficient. That's good news for us.

[14 : 47] It's also good news that God does not need us. Because if God did need us, we think about ourselves honestly, we discover that we would let him down. If you look at verse 12, there seems to be an implication there.

If I were hungry, I would not tell you. Seems to be suggesting that Israel's track record does not imply here are a trustworthy and faithful people.

And when we're honest with ourselves, both in human terms and before God, we are prone at times to be foolish, to be faithless, and to be disobedient.

So if we needed to provide for what God was lacking, that would be too heavy a burden for us.

We would disappoint him. If his plans for salvation throughout history depended on people, then those plans would certainly fail.

[15 : 53] But instead, we rest and we trust in his perfection and in his perfect plan. Again, in God's kindness as a father, he uses his people in order to carry out his work in the world, but he doesn't need to.

It doesn't make him dependent on us. In his kindness, we can bring him joy. We can enjoy his glory, but that doesn't fill God up.

He has no lack when we worship. So there's good news for us that God does not need us. The flip side of that is it's good news that we need God.

Because we discover in the Bible a God who is big enough to meet all of our needs. Sometimes we can place our hopes in another person and we can be disappointed.

They thought they could carry out what they intended, but found that they didn't have the resources or the time or the wisdom to do it. That's never the case with God. As we say in Genesis 1 and 2, it's clear from the beginning we're made to need God and to need one another.

[17 : 18] And Psalm 50 reminds us this is the God we need. That all that we have comes from this all-sufficient, self-sufficient God who in love and kindness provides for his creation.

He says to Israel, Remember, I am the God who has infinite resources. And that's a great reason for us to trust him. This is a God who delights to share generously in order to meet the needs of his people.

So when we invite other people to know God or to trust in God, this is the God who we are inviting them to know. A God who is big enough for them, just as we find that he's big enough for us.

And part of that care is that God uses people in our lives to provide for us. So he places us in families.

He places us in friendships. He places us in churches as part of the way for us to have our needs met and part of the way for others to have their needs met.

[18 : 24] So our care as we seek to serve the Lord Jesus, we are representing God's arms and legs in the world as we seek to care for others.

So we have a God who is big enough to meet all of our needs. And it's good news that we need this God because it means also that we can be honest about our needs.

Some cultures, the tendency, and ours included, the tendency is to put on a brave faith, to pretend like everything's okay, that the idea of showing weakness is weakness.

And when we have that attitude kind of ingrained in us, we can bring that both towards people and towards God. So perhaps there might lead to a lack of prayer.

You know, I can sort this. I can do this by myself. I'm supposed to stand on my own two feet, so I'm not going to invite God into this situation. If we have that kind of attitude, it can cause us to pull away from community because we don't want others to discover that we don't have everything all together, that we can't always look after the things that we need, but we'd rather hide that away.

[19 : 46] And so we pull away from community. It can also lead to us having a real lack of rest because we're so busy trying to be truly self-sufficient when God is the only absolutely self-sufficient one, and he always made us to be dependent on him and on others.

And so one of the things that this reminds us of as people is that we are to be honest about our needs, that we need God and the help and the care that he provides.

What we see positively in this section is the kind of response God wants from his people. Look with me at verses 14 and 15.

Having criticized them for their worship, which is based on a misunderstanding, he says, this is how you should worship. This is how you should live before me. So verse 14, sacrifice thank offerings to God.

And again, verse 23, he who sacrifices thank offerings honors me. So very simply here is an invitation to us to be thankful to the God who provides for us, to recognize that he is the giver and we are the receivers, not the other way around.

[21 : 08] He says in verse 14 also, fulfill your vows to the most high. Remember, God is speaking to the covenant people of Israel.

So here is a call to us to live in covenant relationship where we depend on God, where we live under him in obedience to him, and also where we can give up the lie of self-sufficiency, where we have the proper creator-creature relationship, where we know how much we need him in our lives.

And tied up with that, verse 15, call upon me in the day of trouble. Here is an invitation to us to humbly pray in the needs that we have, to the God who has no need and the God of infinite provision.

Prayer reminds us that we are dependent on God. Prayer gives us that opportunity to be open with God about our weakness, about our need, about our temptations.

And rather than hiding that away and pretending like we've got it all covered, here we're told it's truly human, it is strength to properly respond to our limitations.

[22 : 32] And what does God say of himself? Verse 15, I will deliver you and you will honour me. And then again in verse, end of verse 23, I will show him the salvation of God.

Here is this great provision that God makes for us in his loving grace. He provides for our salvation, saves us from our sin, saves us so that we might know and love him.

And after all, wasn't this the whole point of the sacrifices? The sacrifices that they are offering, thinking that they are serving a needy God, were intended to say to them, you have a sin problem and only God can meet that need of forgiveness.

That these sacrifices were ultimately pointing forward to Jesus, the true and the perfect sacrifice, the one who would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And so the great good news of this psalm is that God saves. The great news of the Bible is that Jesus comes to meet our deepest need.

[23 : 49] When we think about the coming of Jesus into our world, we are met with miracle and mystery of the eternal Son of God becoming truly human.

That he embraces the limits of being human. He understands what it is to depend on others.

He suffers hunger and thirst and loneliness. He depends on others for friendship and for his physical needs. So we have on the one side, Jesus who is limited in his true humanity.

But then at the same time, we get the miracles. And the miracles are like windows showing us and catching us glimpses of Jesus as the self-sufficient God who is able to provide for us in all of our deep needs.

So for example, in Mark chapter 2, Jesus meets with a paralyzed man who is brought to him on his bed.

[24 : 58] He's unable to walk. And Jesus, before he does anything for the man's physical needs, says to him, Son, your sins are forgiven. And then to show that he has authority to forgive sins, he makes the man walk.

In John chapter 6, we discover Jesus providing physically for a vast crowd when he feeds the 5,000. And then he describes himself as the bread of life.

The one who if we come to him and if we feed him, we'll never be hungry. And then in John chapter 11, his friend Lazarus is raised from the dead.

And Jesus speaks to Martha saying, I am the resurrection and the life. So here we discover Jesus meeting physical needs, but at the same time, pointing very clearly forward to the fact that he meets our deep spiritual needs, which of course is what we see at the cross.

Jesus dies to deal with our sin, to bring us peace, to give us eternal life. He is the one who has that ultimate, infinite provision for our worship, for our faith, and for our witness.

[26 : 19] Let's pray together.