

Truth among lies

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[0 : 0 0] have you ever felt uh completely abandoned and alone it's almost a silly question in current circumstances isn't it too many of us are far too alone at the moment too many of us frustrated that we can't be with one another this morning we can't be together for birthday parties for the normal day to day can't be with one another in the really difficult circumstances in illness and in mourning it's possible that david writes these words when he's in a situation of physical isolation a cut off from the people of israel but his concern here seems to be well not so much that he feels cut off uh in a physical way uh but cut off on an emotional and spiritual level he is the last man standing he complains there's no one left who's faithful there are no more godly people no one who is loyal to the lord similarly to the last few psalms at the issue here in psalm 12 seems to be primarily with what people are saying the issue is that other people don't share david's priorities they don't share his values they don't come from the same worldview as he is approaching situations there are no more godly people no one is seeking to live in god's ways anymore and of course that too is a familiar feeling for many of us we're often in situations where we feel isolated in that sense of having different values and priorities to those around us of being the only one who wants to live in god's way for many of us that's a daily reality at work at school in our groups of friends and perhaps a lot of the time it's not a massive problem we can still get on with people but every now and then something happens that that makes us realize once again just how different those values and priorities are makes us feel isolated and alone and maybe for some of us that sense of being alone in our faith maybe that's particularly compounded at the moment for some of us who live alone or who live with family who don't share our faith some feeling cut off from christian fellowship at the moment some of us feeling that we have to live our christian lives without the support of others now david here in this psalm isn't speaking with strict accuracy either he's being kind of hyperbolic like elijah in the desert uh sorry either he's being hyperbolic he's exaggerating or like elijah in the desert uh his despair has driven him to feel like the situation is worse than the reality actually is it isn't actually true that he's the last man standing uh for all that it may feel that way and that is often true for us as well isn't it we might feel like we stand alone but that isn't quite the reality our brothers and sisters in christ are still there and i trust that we're together in prayer even when we cannot see one another if you want to get a little flavor of that togetherness uh then maybe you'd be encouraged by joining in with the prayer meeting on zoom on thursday night i know i find it encouraging to see people's faces and to spend that time in prayer together let me also be encouraging you uh to to keep reaching out making contacts for your own good and for the benefit of others maybe particularly to be in touch with those who are living alone or living without christian family around them to pick up the phone and pray together discuss and encouragement from what you've been reading today or share what you're finding difficult as well let's not let's not feel more alone than we have to now for david and for you and me the statement that no one is faithful anymore it may well be something of an exaggeration but the problem is still real the situation is still very challenging

so in this psalm the first four verses they describe this situation the deceitful words of so many around david so heading one the lies then verses five and six they show us god's truthful words in contrast so like a second heading the truth and then those closing two verses show a right response to the reality of the lies and the truth so then first four verses the lies david is surrounded by liars he looks at society and he says everyone lies to their neighbor flattering lips verse two this points to a corrupt or even evil motive because the purpose of flattery is to get something out of someone isn't it it's to deceive even to cheat you try try to get somebody into a positive frame of mind whether what you're saying about them is true or not you want them to be positively inclined towards the request that's going to come along after the flattering words you think maybe you'll get

a better deal in your business negotiation if you say some nice things about the other person first the intent here is not pure the goal is to deceive to advance your own agenda irrespective of the cost or consequences for others and the sort of smooth talk that's being envisaged here it's it's glib it's facile it's it's false it's pleasing but it's deadly and these people harbor deception in their hearts and remember for the bible writers when they talk about the heart this points not just to the emotions that we tend to talk about in the heart but for them the heart is the seat of the thoughts as well of the inmost being if you like and in this case what david says is they speak with a heart and another heart they don't say what they truly think they don't say what they really mean they they hide the truth within them in in another heart so to speak so this is not like when we talk about being in two minds about something that's talking about this indecisiveness or uncertainty so it's not that kind of being in two minds but rather the point is that the speaker knows the truth but chooses not to say it pretends to believe something else so the sense is something more like the the double think of orwell's 1984 maybe you think or say one thing at work and then another thing at home maybe you say something that's convenient to you rather than sticking to the truth you hide the reality deep inside and what you say conveys what you want people to think not the reality so no wonder in verse 3 david has to ask god to silence the flattering lips and the boastful tongues because god is the one who has the power to do it our words can have a massive impact can't we and the bible doesn't underestimate this cursing and lying are among the sins for which god's people are condemned by the prophets prophets like hosea in chapter 4 and then james is explicit about the danger of the tongue in his letter he says the tongue is a small part of the body but it makes great boasts consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark the tongue also is a fire a world of evil among the parts of the body it corrupts the whole body sets the whole course of one's life on fire and is itself set on fire by hell the tongue is powerful so it takes god's intervention to silence deceitful talk the hubris of those who ask who is lord over us verse 4 these wicked people believe the answer to that question is no one there is no lord over us they don't think they have a master they are captains of their own destiny but verse 5 says otherwise verse 5 we come to our second heading we consider the truth that comes from god god doesn't sit silent in the face of this challenge to his authority he says i will now arise he will take action to protect those who are being harmed by these flattering boastful words and attitudes and as in previous psalms this language of of rising up kind of pictures god swinging into action after a period of seeming inactivity god acts in response to the situation verse 5 it's because the poor are plundered and because the needy groan that is why he rises up and as god's people cry out for his protection as they long for safety in god he will indeed answer that prayer so here in verse 5 this is god's assurance to his desperate people this is his promise given in the first person as god himself says i will now arise i will protect and then verse 6 is if you like an assurance about that assurance verse 6 is david's reflection on what god has said why is it that david's confident god will do what he says why is david confident he will rise up and protect well because the words of the lord are flawless like silver purified in a crucible like gold refined seven times see in dramatic contrast to these deceitful flawed flattering words coming from other people the words of god are perfect we sang a few minutes ago about god's holy word about our confidence in god's purity about those truths that are unchanged from the dawn of time and about the promises that we can stand on by god's grace and the imagery that david uses here this image of the refining fire the the purification of the silver this points to the preciousness and to the perfection of god's words of his promises that which god has said is utterly dependable god's words contain no dross no imperfections and therefore they can be relied upon isn't this a comfort isn't this a reassurance in days when when so much around us is changing so rapidly at a time when even if our public figures are indeed speaking in good faith and and not deliberately flattering and deceiving even if the situation that we're in isn't quite the same as david is here yet still we know that what we are told from our politicians and so on what they say one day may well change the next not out of malicious intent but simply as they respond to a changing situation well the god who sees the future doesn't have to go back on what he said yesterday in order to deal with today isn't it a comfort to hear from the god whose words are flawless who does not change like shifting sand charles spurgeon the 19th century preacher he said the bible has passed through the furnace of persecution literary criticism philosophic doubt and scientific discovery and it has lost nothing but those human interpretations which clung to it as alloy clings to precious all the experience of the saints has tried it in every conceivable manner but not a single doctrine or promise has been consumed in that most excessive heat in a world where so little is dependable

where so many seek to flatter and deceive in such a world what a joy it is to hear from the one whose words are utterly dependable whose declarations have stood the test of time and so my invitation to you today i guess is to consider dialing back a little bit the amount of time that you spend listening to the the flattering words or to the changeable words of politicians and news readers and armchair experts on this and that and the next thing on social media to dial down that voice and to dial up the time that you spend listening to these words to these flawless words to to dust off your bible and start reading one of the gospel accounts of jesus life so open up the book of psalms and continue through these songs and prayers that that grapple with these difficult situations of life now if you don't have a bible at home or you can read it all online or at the moment the the niv audio bible as read by david suchay better known as poirot it's available for free download at the moment i'll pop the link on facebook later today maybe you'd find it easier to listen along uh than to uh have to uh focus in and try to read it yourself because god's word is flawless like silver purified in a crucible like gold refined seven times because that is the nature of god's word then it's well worth your time and mine to hear what god has to say so well we've looked at the reality of the lies and we've seen the contrast with god's flawless truth so what should be our response here we turn to the last couple of verses of the psalm when david declares you lord will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked who freely strut about when what is vile is honored by the human race so a couple of important elements to note here in these closing verses firstly we see that david declares his confident trust given the declaration in the previous verses from god that he will arise given that declaration david is confident that he will be safe that god will protect the needy from the wicked forever given the promises that god has made the appropriate response from us is is to trust those words isn't it to accept what he has said it's right and proper that we heed the call of philippians chapter 4 that we not be anxious about anything but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving we present our requests to god and therefore we can have that peace that david finds here the peace that paul promises in that following verse of the letter to the philippian church trusting in god's promises brings peace but the second thing to notice is that crucially this happens even in the midst of that difficult situation that it doesn't depend on the transformation of our circumstances that though peace can come even in the midst of the storm we find hope in god's truth even among the lies of others now this is perhaps not quite as obvious as it might be in these closing two verses because the two verses run together as one sentence here in the niv that we're reading from but i think what we're meant to see is verse 8 describing what is still true it's still the case that the wicked strut and prowl around it's still true that vileness is honored by the human race that's still the situation as david writes this psalm that's still his experience his circumstances and the promise of verse 7 that god will protect his people the promise of romans chapter 8 that god works all things for the good of those who love him these promises are true even amid the challenging situation god's words are flawless god's promises are true this is the reality even as wicked men seem to prosper they are sure and certain even when it looks like god's protection is failing maybe you've seen pictures like this one of lighthouses being battered by storms well that's the idea here the storm is still there those waves haven't gone away they are crashing against the tower in full force god does not promise to take away the storm but he does guarantee that the foundation will halt let's pray well god as we live in in the midst of untrustworthy words as we live in days where we do not know whether to trust what we are told even by our friends lord thank you that there is nothing more certain than what you have said that there are for you no broken promises no no words that fail to come to pass no words that what you have said you will do that how you were yesterday you will be today and tomorrow thank you lord that you are dependable thank you that even as we are battered by the storms of life thank you that even as we we don't know how we are going to cope with our circumstances thank you that we can have that confidence that the foundation will hold because we are built upon the dependable rock of your word in jesus precious name amen