

Summer in the Psalms: Psalm 7

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Let me just get my things situated here. Good to see you all this morning.

! This morning we're going to be in the book of Psalms, chapter 7. And from what I understand, this will be our last message in the Psalms until next summer. So if you have just been waiting to hear Psalm 8, just hang tight with us for another nine months or so. We'll pick up right where we left off, I promise.

Lord willing, unless something changes. And since we have 17 verses we're covering this morning, a little bit of a longer Psalm, let's not waste any time. I will go ahead and read the passage, and then I will pray for us. So this is Psalm 7. It says, A shigion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.

O Lord my God, in you do I take refuge, save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me, lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it in pieces with none to deliver.

O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, if I have repaid my friend with evil or plundered my enemy without cause, let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it, and let him trample my life to the ground and lay my glory in the dust. Arise, O Lord, in your anger, lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies. Awake for me, you have appointed a judgment.

[1:50] Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you. Over it, return on high. The Lord judges the peoples. Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me.

O let the evil of the wicked come to an end. And may you establish the righteous. You who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God. My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart.

God is a righteous judge and a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will wet his sword. He has bent and readied his bow. He has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts. Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief.

And gives birth to lies. He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head. And on his own skull, his violence descends.

I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness. And I will sing praise to the name of the Lord the Most High. Father, I'm sure many of us have been on the receiving end of harsh or unloving words this week. I'm sure that many have been mistreated or mocked or misunderstood or even attacked. And I'm sure also that we've played our part in mistreating others, assuming the worst, perpetuating gossip. Would you forgive us, Lord?

[3:37] As we turn to your word for answers this morning and for gospel truth that we can carry with us this coming week, I pray that you would show us the beauty of your son. Help us as we seek to follow you. And I pray that you would teach us how we ought to respond when it feels like our enemies are closing in around us. We thank you, Lord, for being our refuge, our justice. We commit this time to you now, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in the 2010 British period drama Downton Abbey, here we go, one of the first characters viewers are introduced to is a man named John Bates. Mr. Bates arrives at the estate of a family of British aristocrats to serve as personal servant to the patriarch of the manor, Lord Grantham. But as soon as he arrives, we see Mr. Bates become the target of intense animosity from the nastier members of the servant staff due to a limp that he suffers. Mr. Bates very quickly proves himself to be a capable man, honorable and meek, which is met with jealousy from two particular servants known as Thomas Barrow and Miss O'Brien. Now, throughout the whole first season of the show, these two decide it is their job, it is their life's calling to utterly destroy the image of this man, beginning with Miss O'Brien tripping him and causing him to stumble while honored guests are arriving.

And not long after, Thomas attempts to frame Bates by stealing Lord Grantham's precious snuff box, and don't ask me what a snuff box is, and hiding it in Bates's room. All the while, these two are spreading gossip and slander about Bates to the rest of the staff, seemingly for the sole reason that he is an honorable man. But how do we see Mr. Bates respond to opposition from these two? Almost complete silence.

The bitter remarks, the false and inflammatory claims, even when he's unsuccessfully framed for theft, instead of taking vengeance, Bates quietly returns the box to where it was taken from. Bates's story in the first season reaches its climax when it's found out that he had spent time in prison for theft years prior. Of course, seizing on the opportunity, Miss O'Brien spreads the story as widely as possible amongst the staff, prompting Bates to immediately offer his resignation to Lord Grantham. And what we learn, despite Mr. Bates's intense refusal to defend himself, is that he had actually taken the fall for his wife's thievery. Now, as a viewer of the show, I must say he is a frustrating character to watch. On the one hand, he's beyond admirable and meek, but on the other, it almost gets tiresome how the man never, and I mean never, defends his own honor. And even though he's a fictional character, I think this is actually what makes him so compelling throughout the series.

John Bates is almost always the target of some kind of ridiculous slander, and he will almost never speak a word in his own defense. I don't know if you have been in John Bates's shoes before, but I would guess that most of us have been the target of rumors, gossip, or slander at one point or another in life, and whether it was a focused, deliberate campaign against your character spanning months or years, or if it just began as a small rumor that suddenly took on a life of its own.

[7:31] There are few things that feel as threatening, as dehumanizing. It is completely out of our control. Now, you may be asking yourself, why are we talking about a character from Downton Abbey in a sermon about Psalm 7? And the reason is that while the series gives us a palpable example of someone standing up under intense personal attacks, we are offered no more explanation for this admirable response than just vague appeals to honor or integrity. We are offered no real guidance for how we can remain faithful under this unique kind of suffering. Psalm 7, on the other hand, not only shows us a man suffering false personal attacks without taking justice into his own hands, but it also shows us from where he receives this strength and resolve to respond in the way that he does.

So let's take a look at the text together. You'll notice in the superscription, the heading above Psalm 7, that this is a shigayon of David. There's a fun Hebrew word for you this morning. To the best of our knowledge, according to commentators and Dr. Jerry Vreeland, that word tells us that this is a frenzied, frantic psalm. It is an anxious, desperate cry for the Lord's help. And what situation has David found himself in this time? Well, the event that prompted David to sing these words to the Lord, we're told, were the words or accusations of a Benjaminite named Cush. What do we know about Cush?

Well, we know that he belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, and beyond that we know absolutely nothing. Despite that, the concept of David being targeted by an accusation from a Benjaminite is not unfamiliar if you will recall some of the political instability that marked the final years of David's reign as king.

The heading kind of clues us into a handful of episodes in which David is slandered and opposed by his own people, and it actually starts in his own household. So look at 2 Samuel chapter 15 with me, just for a moment. Verse 1 says, After this, Absalom got himself a chariot and horses and fifty men to run before him.

And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, From what city are you?

[10:22] And when he said, Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel, Absalom would say to him, See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you.

Then Absalom would say, Oh, that I were judge in the land. Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.

And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment.

So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. Now, if you were here a few weeks ago, when Pastor Jay preached on Psalm 3 earlier this month, you'll remember this passage and the

complicated story of this guy named Absalom.

But to remind you of the major plot points up to 2 Samuel chapter 15, Absalom is introduced as one of the sons of David. And we're told concerning his appearance that in all Israel, there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom.

[11:38] And you ought to know, whenever a character in Old Testament narrative is described as being exceedingly handsome or beautiful, it almost always means trouble.

And what do you know? From the first we hear of Absalom, his life is marked by trouble. The event that really sets off most of Absalom's story occurs in 2 Samuel 13.

I won't make you turn there. To summarize, we see Absalom's half-brother, Amnon, become desperately infatuated with Absalom's sister, Tamar.

And it leads to this horrific plot for Amnon to get Tamar to be alone with him, and he takes advantage of her. Now, if you were to imagine what Absalom's response might be to hearing what Amnon had done to his sister, I'm sure we would have a hard time judging him for even the most explosive kind of vengeance.

But what are we told after this occurs? What's his response? It says, Absalom spoke to Amnon, neither good nor bad, for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister, Tamar.

[12:53] You see, Absalom is the cold and calculating type. He doesn't lash out in anger, but rather he lets it simmer. And he spends the next two years plotting to take justice into his own hands.

He slowly earns his brother's trust, invites him to a feast with his servants, and when Amnon had drunk just enough wine to let his guard down, Absalom gave the order, and his servants settled the score.

By the time we meet Absalom again, in 2 Samuel 15, he's what we might call the anti-prodigal son. After murdering his brother, he had taken refuge across the Jordan River in Geshur, but after some time, David had ordered Absalom to be brought back to Jerusalem.

And in this story, David didn't run out to embrace him and joyfully welcome his son home. There was no feast, there was no fattened calf, no.

Instead, David said, let him dwell apart in his own house. He is not to come into my presence. So that is where we meet Absalom when the conspiracy begins.

[14:10] He's back in Jerusalem, and he has once again spent two years plotting, calculating his vengeance, and now he sits outside the gates, planting seeds of dissatisfaction in the hearts of his father's people.

And notice how crafty he is. In verse 3, he says, See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you. Oh, that I were judge in the land, and every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.

And I think if you were to pick out a single statement from the life of Absalom that just defines his entire story, I think it'd be those words right there. I would give him justice.

So this, we're told, is how Absalom stole the hearts of Israel. He offered to become their judge, jury, and executioner, just as he had been for Tamar, and just as he now would be against his own father.

And the chapters that follow are nothing short of chaos. We don't have time for them, but you really ought to read the story when you have the chance. But Absalom succeeds in conspiring to get his father thrown out of Jerusalem.

[15:25] He turns the tribes of Israel against him, and then he gets his own hair caught in a tree and is impaled by three javelins. Spoiler alert. Go read it. Here's my point.

Absalom was a man who saw justice as something to be seized. And having done irreparable damage to David's reputation, especially among the other tribes of Israel, his campaign against his father would outlast his own lifetime.

So really, it was Absalom's words that would find themselves on the lips of Shimei, a Benjaminite who cursed David up and down during the time of his exile.

It was Absalom's words on the lips of Sheba, another Benjaminite who started a rebellion of his own, saying, We have no portion in David. We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.

And it was David's son's words, surely, that were in the mouth of Cush, the Benjaminite who we see accusing David in Psalm 7.

[16:28] Again, all because Absalom had taken justice as he saw it into his own hands. So now, knowing the background of David's plea in Psalm 7, let's begin working our way through verse by verse.

And as we do that, I would like for us to notice what I believe are four key movements of this psalm. And I'll give them to you as we go. Let's look at the first section.

Verse 1. O Lord my God, in you do I take refuge. Save me from all my pursuers and deliver me, lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it in pieces with none to deliver.

What's David saying here? He's crying out to God, saying, God, if you do not help me, there is no one to help me, no one to plead my case, no one to vindicate my name.

I take refuge in you because there is no other refuge. Imagine for a moment that, like David, you have had to look on helplessly as your reputation is utterly destroyed by everyone who once adored you, everyone who supported you.

[17:47] And all you could do was just sit by and watch as false accusations and slander tore down your image. How would you respond? How have you responded?

I would freely confess to you today that there have been very few times that when faced with personal attacks, I have responded by entrusting myself to the Lord's justice in the way that David demonstrates here.

The flesh demands that we seek vengeance. The law of sin expects blood. But look at how David responds. Verse 3. Oh, Lord, my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, if I have repaid my friend with evil or plundered my enemy without cause, let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it and let him trample my life to the ground and lay my glory in the dust.

This is David's plea of innocence. God, I think I've done rightly, but I'm still being treated as an adversary. Search me. Test my intentions. Now, of course, we don't know the exact nature of Cush's accusations against David.

But again, based on David's many run-ins with the Benjaminites after Absalom's rebellion, we can be fairly certain that his character is what's under fire once again. Imagine showing the kind of humility that David shows in response.

[19:15] Think of how desperately we want to control the story. Think of what great lengths a person will go to to prove themselves right. We are creatures of self-preservation.

And yes, that's a good design given to us by God. But because of sin, it twists on itself and we become these strongholds of self-deception.

But David says, Lord, only you know the depths of my heart. I can't even trust my own self-examination. Search me.

And if I have done wrong, let my enemy pursue my soul and overtake it. I think, again, it takes a lot of humility to say in David's situation, you know, maybe in some way, I am guilty of what they accuse me of.

Maybe I am. But it takes faith to say, the Lord be my judge. I will not pronounce myself innocent or guilty. The Lord be my judge.

[20:19] So that's the theme of the first movement, verses one through five. The Lord be my judge. And notice that he concludes the thought with the word *selah*.

We can see this as David taking a pause to allow the Lord to examine all the corners of his heart. This kind of reminds me of what we do when we take the Lord's Supper. We're saying, Lord, be my judge.

Search my heart. And bring me to true repentance and brokenness over my sin. Examine me. And before we move forward, I also think we ought to ask ourselves the uncomfortable question, and I can't help but feel this is a core tension of Psalm 7.

It's the question of, how could a sinner, vile and blood-stained, possibly find comfort in the justice of God?

It's incredibly rare, more than we want to believe, probably, that in our conflicts with other people, we don't carry at least some of the blame.

[21:29] You are a sinner. I am a sinner. All of our interactions, all of our words, all of our thoughts are going to be stained by that. So in my mind, wouldn't appealing to the judge of the universe be the last thing a sinner would want to do?

Maybe I'm wrong, but usually criminals try to avoid courthouses. How could someone like David find rest in something as terrifying as the justice of God?

How could someone like me find rest there? I won't rehash for you the story of David's life, his great successes, and his spectacular failures, but this was a man on the other side of the cross, a thousand years before Jesus came into the world, who on his worst day understood the mercy of God better than we sometimes do.

So be reminded today, Christian, that what was once your greatest peril has become your greatest refuge, and that is the justice of your great and merciful God.

How can a sinner find rest in the justice of God? Only by the blood-bought forgiveness of the judge himself. Let's go on to the second movement of this psalm.

[22 : 58] Verse 6. Arise, O Lord, in your anger. Lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies. Awake for me. You have appointed a judgment.

Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you. Over it, return on high. So now, having been examined and tested by the only true judge, David has received his vindication.

You can hear the sudden shift in his words. Arise, O Lord. Lift yourself up against my enemies.

Awake for me. Look at the power that results from being vindicated by a just God.

Christian, do you have this kind of confidence in the Lord? Do you realize the weight that has been removed from your shoulders? Or are you still submitting to the yoke of sin? I fear that we overcomplicate our forgiveness.

Yet here's David, not knowing the name of Jesus, but he knows this. God has declared me innocent. My opponents have nothing to stand on.

[24 : 03] God is for me. And that is why he can say, going on now to verse 8, the Lord judges the peoples.

Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me. O let the evil of the wicked come to an end and may you establish the righteous.

You who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God. My shield is with God who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge and a God who feels indignation every day.

So we've moved from, if God does not take up my cause, no one will, to now, God has heard my case and in his eyes, I am innocent.

Therefore, let evil be utterly destroyed. This is the cry of verses 6 through 11. It's the theme of this movement of the psalm. The Lord establish righteousness.

[25 : 12] The Lord establish righteousness. And David prays that God would bring his righteousness to bear not just in the world around him, but in David's own heart.

Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me. Now perhaps David was glimpsing ahead through the fog at something that was yet to come.

But God would not judge David according to David's righteousness alone. Rather, we'll remember what we're told in Hebrews 11 about those who lived by faith before Jesus came in the flesh, which says, all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had promised, provided something better for us that apart from us, they should not be made perfect.

Did God judge David according to his righteousness? No. We're told that David was commended through his faith in God and on that basis, justified.

So David could say, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God, judge me according to my righteousness. And by faith, God would become his righteousness through Jesus Christ.

[26 : 36] And that is where you stand today, Christian. You can plead, God, judge me according to Christ, who is my righteousness. Don't forget that Christ is your everything now.

You are judged according to him. That is the only way that a holy God can be your refuge and your shield. On to our third movement of Psalm 7.

Verse 12. If a man does not repent, God will wet his sword. He has bent and readied his bow. He has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.

So we have at this point fully pivoted from David's present trouble into this picture of the impending judgment of God against sin.

Look at the urgency of these words. He has bent and readied the bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons. And don't be mistaken, thinking that this is a portrait of an impatient God, unforgiving and blinded by rage.

[27 : 45] No, this is a call to repentance. This is the mercy of God. There is still time. Find yourself on the side of justice and righteousness instead of darkness and wickedness and lies.

But what, tragically, is so often the fate of the wicked? Verse 14. Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies.

He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head and on his own skull his violence descends.

What an image. Conceiving evil, pregnant with mischief, giving birth to lies. So we've turned now to examine the side of the slanderer, the gossip, the false accuser.

Out of the darkness of his heart, the wicked man can't help but produce strife and division. It's interesting, if you recall for a moment, the anguish Absalom caused his father, not just in his own lifetime but for years afterwards, how simply by allowing a kernel of evil disguised as justice to take root in his heart, Absalom ended up murdering his half-brother, betraying the trust of his family, sowing decades of political turmoil throughout the divided kingdom, and his reward, his violence descends on his own head.

[29:16] He's impaled by his father's armies hanging from a tree. Absalom was a man to whom justice was something to be seized. Concerning his half-brother Amnon and even his father David, we can practically hear him saying, vengeance is mine, I will repay.

Yet in so doing, he brought vengeance on himself. Yet still for David, at least after much time and many episodes of getting it wrong, he knew that justice was something best left in the hands of the judge.

So the verdict of verses 12 through 16 is clear. The Lord judge the wicked. Not me. That's our third movement of this psalm.

The Lord judge the wicked. Now, on one last note before we continue, I think it's natural for us to experience some discomfort when we see David jumping for joy at the thought of God destroying his enemies.

And if you've read some of the other psalms, this is honestly very mild. But as New Testament believers, I think we ought to recognize that God demonstrated a greater ethic for us when he came into the world, bore the sins of man, and as we're told, was oppressed, afflicted, yet opened not his mouth.

[30:43] I think with the cross clearly in view, our greatest hope for those who've wronged us is no longer vengeance from above, but to say, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

We ought to pray for their repentance. And you have a duty, Christian, to forgive just as much as you have been forgiven, which is an unimaginable amount.

You were forgiven much to forgive much. I also think, on the other hand, that the New Testament has given us great clarity as to who our true enemy is.

And by that, I mean sin, death, the devil himself, and all the spiritual forces of evil at work in this world, blinding sinners to their need for a savior.

So if you want to take up the words of the imprecatory psalms, like Psalm 57, O God, break the teeth in their mouths, tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord.

[31:41] Remember the words of Paul in Ephesians 6. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Remember who your true enemy is. And our psalm closes with the fourth and final movement, verse 17.

I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High.

David has moved from desperation to total surrender to the Lord's justice, to hoping for repentance, and finally now he ascribes praise to his righteous God.

So the final movement of the psalm, here we could call to the Lord be praise. And that's really the pinnacle of his prayer. Lord, whether you save me or not, I will praise you.

I will glorify your name. You are just in all things. So in all of this, I think we've seen from David a marvelous example of how we can humbly entrust ourselves to God when we're intact by others.

[32:52] So a few areas of application this morning. Firstly, I'd like to speak to how we Christians ought to respond when we see unjust attacks occur.

And I think there are two flavors of this that we've seen plenty of times throughout our lives. There's attacks against ourselves, and there's attacks against others. If you are sitting here this morning and you have been the subject of undeserved hostility, I think this psalm provides great comfort.

On the one hand, be encouraged, Christian, that even when it feels like everyone around you has abandoned you and taken up arms against you, you can entrust your soul to a God who knows all,

who judges rightly, who sees and discerns all the intentions of the human heart.

Although the fear of man might tempt you to defend your reputation and fight for your own kingdom, God has given you a new, unstained, and unstainable reputation. He's given you an indestructible kingdom.

And for every wrong done against you, well, he's forgiven you for so, so much more. So brother or sister, rest in the justice of God today.

[34 : 11] Now honestly, where we can much more easily go astray is when we see those we love targeted by slander or attacks from others. And the reason I say that is because when those close to us are wronged, I think our love for them can give us far greater license to burn with rage and bitterness toward the other party.

And to add to it, the perpetrator usually has no duty to ask us for forgiveness. The 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, warned in one of his many lectures to his students that our most noble actions, our purest instincts, can sometimes most easily mask the sinful intentions of our hearts. And what better a disguise for our hatred and unforgiveness than the self-deception that, well, we're simply standing up for those we love. And I'm not saying we always see the ones closest to us reconcile with their opponents.

Sometimes there's restoration and repentance, and sometimes we watch the wounds get reopened day after day and year after year. But when you've been as faithful as you can be to support and encourage and advocate for those you love, or you have contended to the fullest for those who can't contend for themselves, at the end of the day, you have the choice whether you will continue to hold unforgiveness in your heart.

Because by so doing, you are poisoning your soul with a bitter wine that it was not meant to drink. I also want to recognize a number of you with us this morning for whom Christianity might be something you look at from the outside.

[35 : 56] Now, whatever you believe about the origins of life or the purpose of this universe, I would remind you this morning that you and I have the same instinct deep down, the same heartbeat that we've discussed this morning.

It's the desire to see justice win. It's a gut-level feeling, and even if you resist the labels of good and evil, even if you and I have different ideas of how justice looks, you know evil when you see it.

And I bet, like me, you wish to see it totally dismantled. I would submit to you this morning that your heartbeat for justice is a reflection of the God who made you.

In fact, it's just a drop of water in the ocean that is the justice of God. Whatever stirs in you when you read headlines about horrific crimes, murders, betrayals, conspiracy, infidelity, greed, imagine how surpassing God's indignation is.

And imagine being on the other end of that indignation. The Bible tells us the broken story of humanity. It tells us that each and every one of us belongs under the same sentence as the murderers, the abusers, the slanderers.

[37 : 06] And it's because we've joined right along with them in perpetrating evil in the world. But because God is not only just but loving and loyal and merciful, he jumped right into the middle of the story and became one of us.

And he, Jesus Christ, died so that the curse of death could be broken. And he rose from the dead so that we can look forward to when everything is made new, when all the tears are wiped away, and when justice sits on the throne of the universe forever.

That's the God we believe in. That's where our hope comes from. So my one word for you this morning as you leave here and continue yearning to see justice in our world is believe.

Believe that Jesus Christ is the only justice for this world. Believe that in him you can have freedom and hope and life. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, you are our righteousness. You are our joy. You are our peace. And Lord, you are our justice.

[38 : 12] We rest in you, God. You who are totally sufficient for us today, this week, and for all of our days. We love you, Lord. It's in your precious name, Jesus, we pray.

Amen. Amen.