

In the Shadow of Your Wings

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Date: 01 October 2023

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[0 : 00] Psalm 17. Psalm 17.

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Well, will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Let's pray. Father, when we go through seasons of being under personal attack, it can be such a lonely time.

And it can be a time where we even doubt whether you're hearing us and whether you're for us. So I pray that you would speak to each one of us through your word today and lead us to where your psalm leads us, that we might see our reward is in you, in knowing you.

[2 : 51] So may your spirit fill each one of us as we listen to you speak to us through Psalm 17. So be with us now, I pray. Amen.

Well, imagine after the grief of losing a parent, you then receive a letter from your sibling's lawyer saying that they're contesting your share in the will.

Imagine a co-worker in your department puts in a formal complaint against you, and it's a serious one.

It could result in your suspension, dismissal. Imagine a close friend you once confided in, perhaps even in the church, has cut communication with you, and you're hearing that they're saying all sorts of things about you to try and turn others away from you as well.

Imagine the organisation you're a member of is being investigated, putting a target on your back because you're a part of that group, which is currently happening in the Northern Territory for the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship.

[4 : 05] Now, perhaps you don't have to imagine because some of these examples, while it's not exactly what's fitting your experience, it's bringing up deep hurts, deep wounds that you carry with you to this day.

The opening to Psalm 17 tells us that David is under personal attack. He's being treated unjustly by people, not just circumstances generally, but by people.

Probably the situation is with Saul hunting him down, and he's appealing to God to vindicate his innocence and restore him.

Psalm 17 teaches us how to respond in a God-honouring way when we're under personal attack. Now, I'm guessing that only a few people in this room this morning are going to feel like this is extremely relevant for your situation right now.

But that may not be your situation right this second. So let me just give you a few other reasons why we all need to listen to this psalm. Some will be so wounded by past injustices that it's impacting your relationship with God, your sense of his goodness to you, and it's impacting your current relationships now.

[5 : 34] I think this psalm offers you healing from past hurts. Another reason is we all know someone who has gone through serious personal attack.

This psalm equips us to minister, minister in the church to one another, minister to those we know who have gone through really awful, unjust situations.

A third reason is we're living in a man-centred world. It's just a matter of what degree we go through this. It's if and it's not if, it's when and to what degree.

So better to plan now so that when the panic and the confusion hits, you lean into God. You know how to lean into God. And the fourth reason I'll give is the psalms are a psalm of David.

So this is an insight into Jesus' thinking, his emotions. If you want to know Jesus better, the psalms give us an insight into him.

[6 : 43] So there's a huge reason. If you're following the outline on the back of the bulletin, I did have the question, how can you be confident God hears your cry?

But since printing the bulletin, I've realised that's presuming your response is to cry out to God. So you might want to write down the bigger question.

When under personal attack, how do we as the people of God respond in a God-honouring way? How do we respond in a God-honouring way? And Psalm 17 guides us.

It teaches us to pray, to remember, to wait, to seek and to know.

So let's follow this psalm as it guides us in this. I think we naturally respond to personal attack by plotting.

[7 : 45] Is that your natural response? We fixate all our energies on how we're going to defend ourselves. That's quite a natural response. What evidence can I produce that will prove my innocence?

What line of argument can I come up with that will be persuasive enough to contradict the narrative that these people are saying? What influential people do I need to get on my side so that I can sway this situation towards a just outcome?

We plot. We are talking constantly to ourselves and others, plotting, plotting. And I think the first crossroads of a God-honouring response is at this point.

And if we take a misstep at this point, it can lead us down dangerous paths. We might even find ourselves more in common with the wicked who will do anything by taking matters into their own hands.

The crossroads is found in the title of this psalm. It's a prayer of David. Other psalms, it's songs of celebration like Psalm 18, the next psalm.

[8 : 59] It's a song saying, God has answered my prayer. This is in the midst of David's anguish he's written this. The outcome isn't sure yet. He's still very much under attack.

We hear it in the opening word of the psalm. Hear. Hear a just cause, O Lord. David is confident that God, the judge of all the earth, God, his covenant Lord, will hear his cry.

And he will act in putting things right. I think there can be lots of talk with people, self-talk, opinions, plotting strategies.

But do we talk to the one whose opinion matters? Do we talk to the one whose assessment is based on truth? Do we talk to the one who has the power and whose prerogative it is to give justice?

So the godly response is to pray, is to cry, cry out, not to plot.

[10 : 18] And praying this prayer guides us into other godly responses. I'm not sure if I would land where this psalm lands if it wasn't for this psalm taking me there.

So it's actually praying these words, God has given these words, that puts us on the right path to responding in a way that honours him. So the first and determinative godly response is to pray, cry out for God to hear.

And then verses 3 to 5 show us David then invites God's true assessment of him. He doesn't assume innocence, but he doesn't assume guilt.

Instead he opens himself up to the scrutiny of God's assessment as the true judge, which seems to be a painful path. You have tried my heart. You have visited me by night.

It's a picture of unrest. Unrest. To open yourself up to God's word and what he thinks of you, that's not an easy part. You'll feel like you're in a washing machine.

[11 : 32] It's a picture of unrest, wrestling with your motives and your words and choices. I think it can be pretty, I don't know, relatively easy to convince yourself and to convince your spouse and your friends that you're innocent.

But can you pray these words to God? I think that'll test our integrity. Can I say to God, you have tried my heart.

You have tested me by night and you have tested me, you'll find nothing. Can I say that to God? I've avoided the ways of the violent.

I've purposed that my mouth will not transgress. Can we say these words to God? In praying them, it actually tests us. Claiming innocence means nothing.

If David was guilty, then he wouldn't be asking for deliverance. He would be asking for forgiveness and mercy like he does in other psalms. We've got other psalms to go to when that's the case.

[12:47] So a godly response to personal attack, it might actually mean going to a court of law and confessing all. Putting up no excuses.

It could mean handing in your resignation. That could honour God. If God's assessment shows that we've done wrong. Godliness invites God's true assessment wherever that truth leads.

So is David claiming perfection then? I'm guessing that question's in your mind as it's in mine. Is he claiming perfection?

Can you really say you'll find nothing? I don't think that's necessarily the case. He might be saying, in this matter, in this matter, I'm not talking about my whole life, but in this matter, I'm being falsely represented and mistreated.

It could just be saying that. So Saul, let's say the situation was Saul pursuing him. Saul was convinced David was his enemy.

[14:05] But his perception of him was wrong. Saul's son, Jonathan, had a very different perception of David. Jonathan was meant to inherit the kingdom as the son, and yet he loved David, knowing that David's going to take his throne.

Fancy that. Saul did not have to consider David an enemy. But David never said a word about Saul, despite Saul throwing a spear at him and bringing his old army against him, killing 85 priests simply because they helped David.

He was serious about finding this guy, but David never said a word against Saul. He only ever served him. Even when Saul died, he didn't rejoice, he wept. In this matter, I think he's saying, it's not true.

I'm honouring. I'm honouring God's chosen king. So I think we can take these words on our lips with integrity.

If in this matter, I am falsely misrepresented here. It could be the case that we are convicted of words and responses, and we've confessed those to our accusers, but they still want more.

[15:22] They still think we're guilty of a greater crime. And then we can pray, I've done what I can. I've confessed what I can.

I think the opposite of appealing to God's truth is to speak and act, to take matters into our own hands, to make sure we get the vindication we think we deserve.

I imagine King Saul probably felt the agony of being misunderstood and mistreated as king. But he didn't care about God's word and the truth of the matter.

He just cared about his own restoration of his power and his reputation. He took matters into his own hands. If we don't open ourselves up to God as judge, for his word to be the test of us, I think we could find ourselves becoming the very lion who is willing to tear our enemies apart to restore our own fortunes.

So David prays. He invites God's true assessment. But David's confidence that God will hear his cries have a much deeper basis than his own innocence.

[16:45] He remembers. He fixes his mind on remembering the past. Not what he's done, but he calls to mind that God is not only a judge, but like the kids talk with the big shit, he is like an eagle flapping its wings, guarding her young in the nest.

The basis of David's confidence is the Lord's covenant love for him that he set on him. So verse 8 there, keep me as the apple of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings.

That's recalling Moses' song in Deuteronomy 32. The apple of the eye apparently, people think it's the pupil. So it's God's focus, his attention is on his people.

It could also be a picture of his protection. Like if something's coming for your pupil, with a blink of an eye, you'll protect it. It could be a picture of protection as well.

God's covenant love, it's the apple of your eye. You do anything to protect your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings. Deuteronomy 32, Moses' song.

[18:05] Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings. Just in case my words aren't capturing this image, I've got a little video if it works.

If it doesn't, it doesn't really matter. But you'll see a fox coming for an eagle's nest in the top right corner. So that's the picture I think that David is drawing to mind.

His confidence that the Lord is like that eagle and he is that little chick. Whatever enemies are encircling, he's remembering the Lord is closer still and he's going to protect.

He's one of the Lord's chicks. So he remembers God's covenant love and it's on that basis that he prays verse 7.

And it picks up four Hebrew words. Wondrously show your steadfast love as a saviour of those who seek refuge in you.

[19 : 24] Wondrously show, divinely intervene. Your steadfast love, your covenant love, with your right hand, save.

So it could be at the end of verse 7, at your right hand. It could be with your right hand. So it feels like the attackers have all the power.

You come in and save with your right hand because I'm seeking refuge in you. I'm a chick under your wings. So a godly response is to pray and not plot.

It's to invite God's true assessment. It's to remember God's covenant love. And then verses 10 to 13. It's to wait.

Wait for the Lord to stop his enemies. The description of his enemies are the opposite of godliness in verses 3 to 5. They don't invite God's word.

[20 : 29] They close their hearts. They're speaking arrogantly rather than controlling their tongue because they want to please God. They're plotting their attack rather than praying.

It's the opposite. So they're actually... And they're pursuing God's chosen one. They're pursuing David. And so really the enemies are God's enemies because they're pursuing.

Like that chick that the fox is going for. They're gods. You're pursuing me. So it's... Wait for the Lord to stop his enemies.

And the threat is intense. Like this... The psalm gives us language for how we feel when we're under attack. Like they have now surrounded our steps. They set their eyes to cast us to the ground.

He's like a lion eager to tear as a young lion lurking in ambush. The imagery is just, Lord, it is intense. Like it's them or me.

[21 : 38] And we've got to remember David was accomplished in battle. He knew how to wield a sword. But he doesn't. He waits and he cries in verse 13, You arise, Lord.

Confront him. Subdue him. He waits for the Lord to act on his behalf when he so easily could have taken up the sword.

I think at this point I was most convicted this week in preparing. Because two...

I'm not going to share what these are and don't ask me afterwards. My parents always ask me what I'm talking about afterwards. But two occasions came to mind in my past where I was accused of something.

And I don't have regrets for what I was originally accused of. What I do regret is I didn't wait. When things heated up, the intensity of it, I acted and said things that I now regret.

[22 : 41] So it's so hard to wait, isn't it? To wait for the Lord to act on our behalf.

Not to take matters into our own hands. If we read the accounts of those in biblical history or believers' stories through the ages, the Lord can stop people in their tracks however he wants.

He can use someone in the opponent's camp to sway that group to a different course of action. You did nothing.

You didn't even know what was going on. And God can use that to completely change the situation.

He can convict someone and bring them to repentance. He can enable his people to flee.

He can make people drop dead. He can stop however he wants. He sets up kings and disposes them. He can stop the situation whenever he wants.

[23 : 48] I will wait, Lord. I won't take matters into my own hand. You arise. You confront them. Make that claim on the will just be dismissed in court.

Cause my employer to choose justice so that I keep my job. Convict my sister in the church who's slandering.

Convict them. Bring them to repentance. Restore peace. Whether it happens in our lifetime or not, and often it doesn't fully, there is a final day coming when all the attacks on God's people will be confronted.

So a godly response is to pray, it's to invite, it's to remember, it's to wait. And I love how this psalm ends.

And perhaps it's the most challenging, but it's the most rewarding. This psalm leads us to seek for our deepest desire not to be in an earthly outcome of vindication.

[25 : 06] But friendship with God is our reward. One of the ways the psalms help us pray isn't simply to give us words that express our desires, but it's in praying these words that our desires are

conformed, are changed.

God uses them as we pray them to change our desires. That's part of the gift of the psalms to us. So if we compare the reward of the attackers in verse 14 to David's reward in verse 15, both are being talked about being satisfied, having more than enough.

But verse 14, their portion is in this life, in this world. They are filled. Their children are filled. Their children's children are filled.

God may not act to stop them. He may actually give them what they want. And that's their reward. Now, it's possible to translate this in an ironic way, that God is filling them up with his judgments. So it's possible to translate the verse in an ironic way, but it's equally possible to translate it in a literal way. He actually gives them earthly reward, what they're seeking.

[26 : 36] And I think that makes more sense because verse 14 is contrasted with 15. As for me. As for me.

Their portion is in this world. But as for me. I shall behold your face in righteousness. When I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

Lord, you. You're my reward. Even if I get nothing from the will, to have all that money and not you would be punishment compared to having you alone.

Can you pray that? Even if I'm fired and my family loses the security of my job.

You are my security and my status. Lord, even if you give my accuser what they're aiming for.

[27 : 48] As for me, I get you. Even if my sister in the church does turn all my friends away from me. I have your friendship.

You never abandon. That is more than enough. And when I awake, which seems to be pushing towards beyond death, when I awake, I'll be fully like you in righteousness.

And the point of righteousness is so that we can relate to God in friendship. We get the goal of acting righteously. We get God. David has pictured God as the judge of all the earth.

He's pictured him as the covenant lord, like the eagle protecting. And then he finishes picturing God as friend. You are my reward.

Beholding your face. If you've been talking to someone online, you've only ever met them online, what do you say when you meet in person? It's great to finally meet you. Why do we say that?

[29 : 06] We say that because just the, even online, as good as the technology is, once you're in person, beholding them, you just get more of them.

That's what we're looking forward to when Jesus returns. Jesus spoke of this promise.

Matthew 5, 8, Sermon on the Mount, blessed are the pure in heart. What's their reward? For they shall see God. That's the reward of our righteousness when under attack.

The reward isn't simply so that we can look ourselves in the mirror without shame. It's not simply so that we can hold our head high in public. It's not even simply so that God will finally bring us out on top in the end, in this lifetime.

That's not the reward. The reward is friendship with God. I get to see you. I get you. And it's a reward that will satisfy whatever the outcome is.

[30 : 18] I think David started his prayer saying from your presence, let my vindication come. And by praying this, he ends up going, actually, it's not just from.

It is your presence. That is my vindication. That's what my soul's actually wanting. Not just an earthly outcome. The worst that can happen is that all I'm left with is you, God.

And that's quite a reward. I haven't lost. So how do you respond when under attack?

Well, we pray, not plot. We invite God's true assessment. We remember God's covenant love, like that eagle, like a chick under his arms.

We wait for the Lord to act. And we seek our deepest desire, which isn't an earthly outcome, but actually it's friendship with God.

[31 : 27] But this is true for David. How can you and I be sure that God hears our cry when we pray these words?

Because God heard the king when he cried. In verse 11, it turns from singular to plural. They have now surrounded our steps.

I think David is very conscious of his companions. He's being hunted because people are knowing that he's God's chosen one and he's got companions who have put their lot in with him and so their life is on the line because they're a companion of David.

He's conscious that the enemies aren't just circling him, but also his companions. But Psalm 18, which we'll come to next week, is a celebration that God heard David's cry. Saul did not bring him down. David was vindicated. But more than that, at the end of Psalm 16, David prays, you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, to the place of the dead, or let your Holy One see corruption.

[32 : 52] But we know David died. That was prophecy, looking forward to the son of David. David. David. David. David. David. David. David. David. Jesus is the true and better son of David and we can be absolutely sure God hears his cry because on the third day he awoke. The resurrection is Jesus' vindication, that he is God's king, he is God's friend. This prayer makes us soar on another level when we know we are companion of God's king. He has been vindicated by his resurrection. Because now, as a companion of the king, if you have put your lot in with Jesus, we pray, knowing that through Jesus we can enter the throne of grace with confidence, Hebrews tells us.

That word confidence isn't your feeling of confidence, it means you have got the right to enter. We can enter God's throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. [34 : 08] It's through Jesus that we have that confidence to pray now. And could I urge us as a church family, when you're under personal attack, sometimes you can't pray. We need one another to pray these words for us.

We can invite God's true assessment because we're safe in Jesus now. We know that it's his innocence that God looks at and goes, I'm going to act on your behalf because of his innocence. We remember God's covenant love looking at the cross. What a friend. What a friend. How much safer can we be in the shadow of his wings? If Jesus is for us, who can be against us?

We're safe as a chick under his wings, under the cross. We can wait for God to stop our attackers because we see in Jesus that the outcome is guaranteed.

His resurrection says he is the judge and he will finally stop all attacks one day. So how much more should we seek our deepest desire in knowing Jesus, not for an earthly outcome that he can give us, but for knowing him?

[35 : 36] Whatever wealth or reputation or freedom or sense of being loved, and belonging or status, anything we've been robbed of, once we know we have him and all the treasures in him, we've just got a different attitude.

We've got our reward. We haven't been robbed. We've got our reward in him. It's a totally different perspective which will lead us into seeking to honour him.

It will honour him if we can speak and act in a way that goes, my reward isn't in this outcome. That will honour God as precious.

And even losing some of these things, we know that God can use that to drive us deeper into his arms, giving us more of our reward. We can find the vindication our souls are craving not just from Jesus, but in Jesus.

Friendship in having him. we can pray, as for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness.

[37 : 03] When I awake, I'll be satisfied with your likeness. Let's pray. Lord, I pray that as a, as a church family, that we would urge one another to seek our true reward in you and to entrust our souls to our faithful creator and redeemer and continue to do good.

Pray, Lord, that we might express to one another a measure of this great reward in you rather than urging one another to keep pursuing an earthly outcome as if our life depends on it.

Lord, please help us as a church to uphold one another in prayer and in truth so that we might seek your face and be satisfied in that.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.