

Is God's steadfast love enough?

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Date: 09 October 2022

Preacher: David Calderwood

- [0 : 00] Please open your Bible to Psalm 5, a Psalm of David, to the choir master for the flutes. Give ear to my words, O Lord. Consider my groaning.
- Give attention to the sound of my cry. My King and my God, for to you do I pray. O Lord, in the morning you'll hear my voice. In the morning I'll prepare the sacrifice for you and watch.
- For you are not the God who delights in wickedness. Evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes. You hate all evildoers.
- You destroy those who speak lies. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful men. But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house.
- I will bow down toward your holy temple in the field of you. Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies. Make your way straight before me.
- [1 : 07] For there is no truth in their mouth. Their inmost self is destruction. Their throat is an open grave. They flatter with their tongue. Make them bear their guilt, O God.
- Let them fall by their own counsels. Because of the abundance of their transgressions, cast them out. For they have rebelled against you.
- But that all who take refuge in you rejoice. Let them ever sing for joy. And spread your protection over them. That those who love your name may exalt in you.
- For you bless the righteous, O Lord. You cover him with favour as with a shield. Having a proper perspective is so important.
- If we're going to form a conclusion, if we're going to set a course of action, in pretty well any aspect of life, having a proper perspective is critical. Now, it doesn't matter how much we think about that.
- [2 : 12] We will always have some sort of perspective in anything we do. It will either be a good perspective or it will be a narrow, distorted perspective. But we will have one.
- Every time we set a course of action and make a formal conclusion. Having a good perspective or a good point of view means having all the relevant factors included.
- Rightly integrated and properly balanced. As we make a conclusion. But far too often we have a distorted or narrow perspective on things that we're thinking about or acting on.
- And too often that's because we just go on what we see. And that means that other critical factors that may not be apparent aren't actually included.
- And so our perspective is actually distorted or imbalanced. Sometimes really unhelpfully so. For example, this week, courtesy of the Essendon Football Club, I suspect that all Christians like me have just felt the awfulness of yet another public attack, public slanging of Christians.
- [3 : 33] Once again, we've just had to sit and listen as Christianity is just branded as bigoted, even evil. Treated unjustly.

Christians being silenced unfairly. Without even regard for the truth. And it seems that, as we listen in, it seems that this whole notion that's paraded all the time, inclusivity, tolerance, respect, it seems like that's on offer to any set of beliefs, any lifestyle, except Christians.

Now, from there, you see, it would be really easy to form the perspective that God has been squeezed out of our society.

That God is no longer relevant to our society. And that the Christian gospel has been defeated and is powerless in our society. But you see, that would be a really narrow, distorted perspective.

Why? Because it doesn't take into account what God says in his word and who God is in his world. And then we can develop that example.

[4 : 50] And if you're like me, sometimes when you feel excluded from our society, it sort of pushes us to the other extreme and a very different point of engagement when we actually wish we could be involved in our world and accepted.

And then we start to think, well, actually, our world and our culture look so appealing at points, so inviting. And we bounce from something like that Essendon saga to actually this overcorrection of just wanting to be part of our world, be accepted, be welcomed into it.

It looks so appealing. It looks so satisfying. Yet, we have to bear in mind that the Lord says to us, be in the world, but not of it.

Why? Because the good life of fullness and satisfaction is sourced in relationship with him. And we will never find it in the world. That's what Jesus tells us.

And then he says, well, I don't want you to be of the world, but I do want you to be in and of the church. Because as people who are new in Christ, new in me, then I want you to be fellowshiped with people in a community, the resurrection community, where fullness of life is known and enjoyed and modelled to a lost world.

[6 : 17] So there we have it. In the world, but not of it. In the church and in it. But you see, that's a hard perspective to balance, isn't it?

To keep as well. Because then we start to think, well, actually, hmm, the church just doesn't seem to be able to compete with the allure of our world.

And then we think, well, what about all the hurts that I've experienced in the church due to the sinful actions of others or due to my own omissions?

And again, you see, from there, how easily would it be to form a distorted perspective which leads us away from engaging in the church and fellowshiping with other Christians while leading us ever more into engagement with the world?

But again, that would be a very distorted, narrow perspective. Friends, the message of Psalm 5, I believe, is about King David's godly perspective in time of suffering and attack.

[7 : 35] Time when we're being treated unfairly, when we're suffering injustice or just generally suffering as we seek to live faithfully for the Lord in this broken world among rebellious people.

It brings just a level of suffering just doing that. Now, some commentators are convinced that this psalm was written for congregational use and so it sort of looks at suffering from a more generalized level as opposed to Psalm 3 and 4 that we looked at over the last two weeks where it's been a very personal reflection from King David on a very personal issue and situation.

Regardless of that, I think it's a model of how God's people are to handle the normal attacks that comes to them as God's people. In other words, it's a godly perspective and one that we need to take on board, I think, as our world develops in the way it's doing at the moment.

I want to make three or four points. The first one is that David's personal powerlessness pushes him to rest in God's powerfulness. Look at picking up the first three verses there.

Now, the context of the psalm is King David's daily struggle to rule God's people and nurture righteousness or behavior which is pleasing to the Lord given the unruly hearts of his people and given their natural inclination to wickedness which in the Bible is simply anything lived, any life lived in rebellion against God.

[9 : 16] That's wickedness. It doesn't have to be as evil as it possibly can be. It just means a general orientation is called wickedness. A natural born orientation to rebel against God's authority, to seek autonomy, to live without reference to God's word.

Now, that's the struggle David has each day trying to subdue the unruly hearts of God's people. And against this, we see King David's primary weapon of response is the weapon of prayer.

And we see there in verse 3 particularly, verses 2 and 3 especially, but his daily routine begins with David talking to the Lord.

Now, we need to remember that this is a king of a large nation. His day would have been incredibly busy, long, pressured. Every morning so many officials would be coming to him each day seeking advice, reporting on issues.

But David, if I can use the word of Martin Luther, says that, you know, he's too busy not to pray. And he's confident of God's answering of that prayer.

[10 : 43] If you look at verse 3, that last sentence in verse 3, in the morning I prepare a sacrifice, that's a particular interpretation of the Hebrew word, which might actually be a little bit more general, although it's in the same line, I prepare a sacrifice is more likely to be, look, I set out in order the various demands and pressure points of my day and I take them to the Lord in prayer.

And having done that, then I wait confidently for the Lord's guidance, the Lord's answer. And if you look at verse 2, we see an even nicer context because this is King David, a very powerful man, but he recognizes that in all his power, he's powerless.

And so, he comes before the greater king, Yahweh, who is the covenant-keeping God, and the judge of the whole earth, of whom David is but a servant.

And verse 1, then, that explains his urgency, his passion in prayer.

David's expressing the deep feelings of his heart, his mind. Nothing of a mindless habit here, but the specific, ordered, daily committing of his day to the Lord.

[12 : 12] So, what can we say? Well, ultimately, David's prayer is simply spreading out his helplessness before the Lord. He knows that in spite of all his power as a king, and that was substantial power, he is powerless to do the thing that he most wants to do and needs to do as God's king, and that is, subdue the unruly hearts of God's people.

And he knows that opposition to him as God's appointed king is only a symptom of a much bigger battle, a much bigger rebellion, a much deeper unruliness in the hearts of God's people, and that is their rebellion ultimately against God's rule, their desire for autonomy.

And so, the first perspective is here that David in the situation of suffering is doing what he can do as God's servant. He can pray.

He can wait on the Lord. He can worship. He can rest in the Lord. He can trust the Lord. So David does what he can do, and then behind that prayer we see that he's really looking to the Lord to do what only the Lord can do.

as the true effective king and ruler of his world and his people. And so, there's a real calm in David we sense at the beginning of every day that allows him to get into his day with consummate confidence.

[13 : 55] Because every day, David experiences the opposition and sinful behavior of his people. But in a sense, I think we could say here that David, as he prays, pictures himself in God's courtroom where the great king, the great judge of the whole earth, has it all under his control and is doing what he wants to do, as he wants to do it, with whom he wants to do it.

So David, as he prays, is in a sense observing the outworking of God's character. And so that's where he's moving to look in face of his own personal inconstancy to God's constancy.

David's world's turmoil. But as he sees himself in God's courtroom, as it were, he sees calm and order and control. Verses 46, David is confident that God's judgment, justice rather, will be measured out to the wicked.

And the wicked, I say, are those who rebel against God's authority and pursue autonomy in this world, in life. Verse 4, for you're not a God who delights in wickedness.

Evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes. They're all terms of relationship and presence and intimacy, aren't they? You hate all evildoers.

[15 : 28] You destroy those who speak lies. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. David's perspective is, as he engages with God's character, that all sinfulness, all rebellion will be exposed and it will be exposed simply because it's measured against God's righteous character.

Rebellious hearts, rebellious character, overflow into sinful, rebellious actions. And we pick up on those verses and so often those sinful actions are defended and applauded in our world.

But they don't sneak through unnoticed by the Lord. They're roundly exposed and condemned, every one of them. And the consequence of that is just enormous.

They will never dwell with God. Now there's a perspective for you, isn't it? They will never dwell with God.

Devastating consequence of rebellion and autonomy. Something that in this world looks quite attractive, looks quite appealing, quite satisfying. And there we have that important ingredient that we need to have in our perspective.

[17 : 06] They shall never dwell with God. the good life that this world offers us, in inverted commas, proves to be an absolute illusion, deception, when it's set alongside the righteous character of God.

God's mercy. And ultimately, it will be destroyed. Why? Because they do not fear the Lord.

Equally true, verse 7, equally true, David is confident that God's mercy will be gifted to those who live under his rule. And I think when David says in verse 7, but I, that's not a statement of arrogance.

That's a statement of wonderful appreciation of God's grace, as you'll see when you read the rest of the verse. But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house.

I will dwell with you. Why? Not because I'm any better, a whit better, than all the rest of my people, but because I've experienced the benefits of your steadfast love, your grace, your mercy.

[18 : 33] And that could only have been a gift to David because he didn't deserve it. And so David, as he moves forward in his prayer, is very much aware of his own sinful heart provoking him to rebel against the Lord likewise.

And he's very much aware that he also deserves condemnation when he's measured against God's righteousness. Except for God's grace and God's unchanging covenant love in his life.

King David enjoys fellowship with God not because he is different at heart from the rest of his people, but because God has determined to love him and has invited him into everlasting relationship with him.

Which changes David's orientation, changes his status, changes his attitudes, and changes his confidence. Changes everything in respect of himself, in respect of his understanding and appreciation of God, and in respect of his role as God's king in his daily circumstances.

And again, it's a wonderful perspective that David's in the midst of suffering. He doesn't know from one day to the next whether he will make it through the day. He has so many enemies, so many who wish him dead.

[20 : 06] But here's a perspective that allows King David to get on with his day regardless of whether he might lose his life in this world at the hands of those who oppose him.

He has confidence that he will dwell with the Lord. He will be personally and intimately ensconced in God's actual own personal house as it were.

That's how confident, how personal and secure and warm and rich that picture is. And again, the perspective is in total contrast.

So David, in total contrast to those who seem to have life worked out in this world apart from God, but David will be the one who's under the pump.

He will be the one who has, he is the one who has the indestructible home, security and identity with the Lord. And verse eight then is an interesting little addition which I've pondered for quite some time this week, and I've put it down the way it is here.

[21 : 17] I think David now looks to the Lord to coach him in righteousness. I'm not sure whether that's the right word, I've tried lots of different words, so forgive me if that's a jars with you, but let me try and explain it to you.

David, I think, looks to the Lord to coach him in righteousness. See, here's the problem. When David understands that in contrast to the wicked, he has a place secured for him in God's dwelling.

It can easily turn into a perspective of arrogance, a sense of superiority that I, in contrast to everybody else, have a place to dwell in the Lord's house.

But it's not like that for David, it doesn't result in that for David. No arrogance, no sense of security, quite the opposite. In response to God's righteous character, David's concern, therefore, is with his own attitudes, his own actions, way before he's got any concern for the wickedness of his enemies.

It's as if this thought he's had in verse 7 just flows over him and makes him so aware of the privilege he has under God's love that his first and only concern really at that moment is his own attitudes, his own actions.

[22 : 38] And so he asks the Lord to coach him in righteousness lest his own lifetime, his own actions, give opportunity for his enemies to mock the Lord.

And again, you see, I think that highlights David's total dependence upon the Lord. Lord, even in his position of security, he's recognizing, perhaps memorizing, remembering what he's actually done in his own life with Bathsheba and other situations.

He's actually, even as he's secure in the Lord, he's very much aware of the fact that he also could go down that path of autonomy and rebellion that so many of God's people choose.

God's love. Why? Because he knows that at heart he has the same rebellious, autonomy-seeking heart. And so then we step through to the next section, verses 9 to 12, where David's praying actually pushes him, therefore, into a new longing for God's honor.

So I'm hoping you see the development here. David starts with his own concerns, in a sense, verses 1 to 3, but by the time we get to verse 9, David's totally consumed with God's concerns and God's righteousness.

[24 : 04] Very different perspective. A much more wholesome perspective in lots of ways. And I think these verses 9, 10, 11, and 12 might actually be evidence of God doing just exactly what David's asked him to do, coach me in righteousness.

As we see his focus shifting from personal concern to concern for God's honor. And David expresses concern for God's honor in two ways, a negative and a positive way.

First of all, in verses 9 and 10, David asked the Lord, act against those who rebel against you. Now, why does David do that?

How can David do that? To our ears, it sounds like a quest for revenge or just a blood thirstiness. But I don't think it is that.

I think David is reflecting on the one hand on the awfulness of sin and rebellion and how so often in our world that rebellion is camouflaged by smooth words that tries to make vice into virtue.

[25 : 19] And that's what we see all around us in our world, isn't it? And David is just reflecting on the awfulness of sin. And from there he bounces to the righteousness of God's character and how sin is just such an offense to God's character.

Because in contrast to the wickedness of rebellion, David sees the constancy of God's heart, the beauty of God's love, the breadth of God's covenant purpose in setting aside these people and determining to save them and make them his own and make them beautiful.

And yet there's this rebellion, rebellion, rebellion. And David, out of concern for God's honor, says, God, act. Act to show yourself to be the righteous God you are.

God's desire. It's not a concern for personal revenge. It's not a twisted delight in seeing people brought down and getting what they deserve.

It's a desire to see God's character clearly evidenced and honored. God's love. And in verses 11 and 12, having asked God to act one way, he then longs for God to act for all who take refuge in him.

[26 : 53] Having experienced himself personally, having experienced the freedom and delight of finding refuge in God, David wants the same for all God's people over whom he rules.

It's not that circumstances have changed for David and there's no longer any danger, any suffering, any personal attack, anything to fear. it's not that aspect of David's perspective has changed.

What's changed is that David has discovered this safe place, this place of refuge, shielded and protected by the Lord. David has discovered and experienced what it means to live under the steadfast love of the Lord.

He's discovered, verse 11, he's discovered a deep joy in the mess and uncertainty of life, a joy that will sustain him in any circumstance and which frees him to press ahead in his immediate circumstances, not demanding the Lord change the circumstance, not being disappointed or angry at the Lord if it doesn't change, but secure in the Lord and in his steadfast love.

love. And finally then, that personal longing that's expressed in verses 11 and 12 there, that personal longing for righteousness and covering pushes David towards Jesus.

[28 : 27] Let me read those two verses to you. But let all who take refuge in you rejoice. Let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.

For you bless the righteous, O Lord. You cover him with favor as with a shield. Oh my goodness, this happened again.

I thought I'd lost a page of notes. Okay. So we follow through the movement for David and we just pick up on this deep longing he has for his people.

He's observed the awfulness of sin and he's hated the sinfulness of sin in his people. He knows his own restless heart.

heart. It's an unruly heart and he's experienced the unruly heart of God's people. He longs for things to be different. And ultimately David knows, we'll go back to the start, ultimately David knows that he's powerless to effect the change in the hearts of God's people that is needed, that is required.

[30 : 01] ultimately he knew that only God could subdue and renew unruly hearts. Only God could stem the flow of wickedness and sin.

Only God could produce passion and delight in righteousness and obedience to God. God. And so that pushes David in his longings for God to act.

And that ultimately takes us to Jesus who actually delivers the cravings of David's heart. Because in the language of verses 11 and 12 of Psalm 5 we have the language of the gospel.

Jesus covered his people. Completely covered them. With what? with forgiveness for all their sinfulness, for all their offense.

He takes away, he covers the stench of the rebellion against God through his death on the cross. And he covers them with righteousness instead.

[31 : 07] And so great was that reversal, so great was that covering that the lips of his people no longer spewed the foulness of verse 9, of this foulness of the grave, the foulness of death.

But these lips were changed to proclaim the songs of praise and worship and delight. it's the Lord Jesus that subdues unruly hearts.

Turning them from desire for rebellion and autonomy to delight in and hunger for righteousness. My friends, what David could only imagine in his mind, and probably couldn't even imagine in his mind, could only sort of search for in his mind, we actually know in reality, in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are these homeless, wicked revels who now have a secure home forever. we are the ones who were caught up in an empty way of life, handed down to us from our forefathers, thinking we had the good life, but being deceived.

We are now those who know true life, and who can say we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[32 : 41] Jesus turned the fruitless search that we see all around us, and people all around us, whether it's family members, or workmates, or people we play sport with, or just general public.

We hear it on the news, we hear it on our TVs. We see this constant fruitless search for blessing and the good life in their own efforts, and apart from God.

God, but in Christ we know the good life. We've been spared that fruitless search. Jesus has come to us, and he's renewed us such that we have joy as image bearers once again, who can find our satisfaction and joy in his steadfast love, in his grace.

we are loved. We are loved forever. We are covered fully in the full extent of God's love.

Nothing held back. This is what God's steadfast love delivered in and through the Lord Jesus means.

[33 : 59] Let me just finish with a question that I like to do. there's a godly perspective which then turns into a question.

Is that a perspective? Is this a perspective? That's enough for you to live faithfully and demonstrably in obedience to Christ this week.

Because when you leave here, maybe even now, even as you're hopefully listening to me, maybe even there's a battle in your mind of the lure of this world, the attractiveness of it, the appeal of it, the invitation of it.

But is this perspective enough for you to live faithfully and demonstrably in obedience to Christ? Opposition, hostility to God will continue and it will continue more and more I think to be aimed and targeted at God's people.

God's people. And the reality is that to be in this world but not of it because we're determined to pursue righteousness and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ will inevitably mean a huge and increasingly huge cost of hostility from the world.

[35 : 17] That's the way Jesus said it will be. That's the way we experience it. And so therefore the question is, is our perspective complete? What we see at one point is frightening, at the other point is alluring.

Both will be a distorted perspective unless we come to it through the likes of Psalm 5. A godly perspective, my friends, will help us choose to have God's blessing, God's home, rather than the pseudo blessing or pseudo home of being at ease in this world, of being at ease with our rebellion, being at ease with a lifestyle that treats the Lord with contempt.

Pray with me then, please. Lord, you tell us to live by faith and not by sight.

And yet, so often we just do the very opposite. We're so often we're bound by what we can see. And what we can see as we look at our world either scares us or draws us in seductively.

Help us, Lord, to cut ourselves loose from that distorted perspective and look at our world through the lens of your steadfast love.

[36 : 57] And to go forth each day into the world convinced that being loved by you is the best thing that we can have. And from there, Lord, give us freedom to serve you with confidence and with courage and with openness.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. All right, thank you for listening to me.