

From the Lord Comes Deliverance

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Lord God, your word says that your word is like a light to our way and a lamp for our path that we might know how best to walk before you.

And we pray that this morning you would speak to us through your word that we would know how best to walk before you today and in the days to come for the glory of your son.

And we ask all these things in his name. Amen. Guoza is a small, smallish town in northeastern Nigeria.

It's where the terrorist group known as Boko Haram have the headquarters of their so-called caliphate. All of the churches of that town have been burnt to the ground.

Many of the Christians have been killed or tortured or abducted or raped and all sorts of things just because they stubbornly refuse to renounce the name of Christ.

[1 : 14] The believers who meet there in Guoza this morning, they will do so in a few hours, but they will do so in secret, certain that if they are found, they will face brutal execution or worse.

Now, I don't know, but I imagine a Boko Haram fighter sneering, God will not deliver them.

Similar scenarios are being enacted in Syria, in Iraq, in Yemen, in all sorts of places where God's people are brutally persecuted.

A friend of mine, Reverend Hassan, is or was a pastor in Khartoum in Sudan. On December the 18th last year, he was arrested and detained in an unknown location.

No public charges have been laid against him and no one has heard of him or knows of his whereabouts.

[2 : 35] Surely, it could be said, God will not deliver him. In countries where it's illegal to declare Christian faith, believers are persecuted and those in authority confidently assert that God will not deliver them.

But it doesn't have to just be in foreign countries. As we go through hardships of various kinds, sickness and rejection, unemployment, disappointment, family breakdown, bushfires, any other sort of trouble, our largely uncaring and God-denying culture echoes, God will not deliver them.

And in these situations, the smugly self-righteous atheist will, almost as a given say, of the Christian person suffering and looking to God, God doesn't exist.

Therefore, he will not deliver them. But it gets even more personal than that. You see, we as human beings have been in the grip of sin, enslaved to it in fact.

As Christian people, we believe that God sent Jesus to free us from that slavery to sin. And Jesus accomplished that breaking of the bondage through his death on the cross and rising to life again.

[4 : 14] And that's the good news of the gospel. We rejoice in it. But if we're honest, we are tempted to go back into that sinful slavery.

We are oppressed and pushed into situations where sin, doubt, and fear raise their heads.

And the tempter, God's enemy, Satan, the accuser, whispers to us in those moments, God will not deliver you.

And that's the starting point of our psalm, isn't it? Verses one and two. Lord, how many are my foes? How many rise up against me?

Many are saying of me, God will not deliver him. The psalmist, of course, is speaking about a specific situation, but he's also talking about all of the situations we have outlined.

[5 : 40] And this is not just an insult against the psalmist laughing at him for having faith in such a weak God. It's also, and most especially, an insult against God himself.

It's saying that God is not powerful enough or effective enough in the face of these problems. It's saying one of three things, or it may be saying all three things at once.

He's saying, it's saying, either God is not there at all, or that he's not strong enough to deal with the situation, or maybe worse, that he's not interested enough.

He doesn't care to deliver those who look to him. Three devastating things to be saying in such times.

And what can we say in the face of those things, those accusations, almost? Well, fortunately, the writer of this psalm knows more about God than his enemies do.

[7 : 01] He's been in relationship with this God. He's spent time getting to know who God is. And so, when the accusations come, he's able to make some assertions about the character of God.

And he says, he makes four that I can see in verses three to six. But these things about God are known to him because, and known to us, because God has revealed himself.

God is not a silent, far off, hidden God. He's a God who loves to show who he is. He's let us know who he is.

We can get to know who God is. We have revelation from him. We can get, we can spend time finding out about God.

And of course, he's revealed himself most especially through his son, Jesus Christ. So, the psalmist, although he may, he didn't know of his, of God's revelation through Jesus Christ, certainly knew his scripture.

[8 : 24] He knew what God, who God is. And so, he's confident and he's able to say these things from verse three to six. But before we even go there, by, by very, the very fact of mentioning the things that are listed in verses three to six, he's already answered the charge that God is not there.

He knows this God. He's there. I know him. You can't say he doesn't exist. It's like if Andrew were out of the room and you were tempted to say Andrew Reid doesn't exist.

And we'd all know that that's an absolute lie because we saw him here this morning. We know him. You can't tell us he doesn't exist. Similarly, that's what the psalmist is saying.

You can't tell me God doesn't exist. I know him. So, these are the four things he remembers about God in verses three to six.

Verse three, the first part, but you, Lord, are a shield around me. In ancient times, a soldier would go into battle with a larger shield to protect himself against the swords, arrows, and spears of his enemies.

[9 : 55] I guess in the same way as a modern soldier might wear a bulletproof vest or something. But the ancient shield was limited in that it was unidirectional.

That is, it could only protect against one direction. You were holding your shield out here, it could protect against arrows there, but no protection at the back.

It only works from one side. But the psalmist talks about God as a special sort of shield.

You are a shield around me from all sides. Imagine a shield that could just cocoon you. And the Lord is like that.

He's a protector from all attacks. He's strong enough to do something about the things that threaten my life. So that's the next lie that is counted.

[11 : 00] God is strong. He is a shield about us. Verse 3 goes on. My glory, the one who lifts my head high.

My glory, the one I glory in, the one I appreciate and I love and I cherish. But more than that, he lifts my head high.

It's a reminder of God's interest and concern for his people. He knows us. He's concerned for our reputation, our honour, our value.

God himself values me, therefore I can lift my head high. And we're reminded that throughout scripture, aren't we?

That God loves his people. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. God is love, we are told.

[12 : 09] I think that that's something that we as modern Christians kind of don't get easily. That God really loves you.

He likes you. He values you. He thinks you're great. He treasures you. You're special. You're wonderful to him. And it somehow doesn't sink in very well.

But it's enough to lift our heads when we realise that it's actually true. So, so much for he's not interested. He's better than interested.

And the Lord answers verse 4. I call to the Lord and he answers me from his holy mountain. Although God is high on his holy mountain, he's so far exalted above us.

He's so much greater than us. He's the creator of everything that is. He's the master of the universe. And yet, even so, when I call to him, he answers.

[13:25] Little old me. further evidence that he cares, of course. Now, of course, because he is God and we are not, his answers may not be the answers that we have in mind.

And he operates on a different timetable to us, and so he may not answer when we might like. But we can be sure that he will answer.

He's not a disinterested God. The Lord will answer. So we've heard that God is a shield, he's a headlifter, and he's an answerer.

Verses five and six give another fact to get out God. God, the Lord, with the Lord, there is security. Verses five and six give two pictures of this truth.

I lie down and sleep. I wake again because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands assail me on every side.

[14:46] The first picture is of a sleeper. And when we sleep, we're completely vulnerable, aren't we? And especially in the context of a battle.

Imagine on a battlefield, lying down and going to sleep. We're powerless at such times. And the psalmist says that he can confidently sleep and wake knowing that it's the Lord who sustains him during the vulnerable times of sleep.

The second picture envisages an overwhelming number of soldiers attacking from every side. Tens of thousands from that side and that side and that all around.

Imagine one person with all those hostiles coming at him from every side. and yet he has no fear because he knows that God is stronger even than that mighty army.

You're accusing God of not being strong enough? Well, listen to this about my God. And again, this is the testimony of scripture time and time again.

[16:12] security not just against physical things, but against the deeper things as well. Paul's able to say in 2 Timothy chapter 1, he talks about what he's going through and his ministry and he says, look, that's why I'm suffering as I am.

Yet that's no cause for shame because I know whom I have believed. And I'm convinced that he's able to guard what I've entrusted to him until that day, until the day of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. So God is the powerful God. He's the maker of heaven and earth.

He's the one who has called us to be his people. He's ultimately powerful and he can be relied upon to protect us and protect all the things that really count in our lives.

So we know that the implicit charges that were there against God in verse two, God will not deliver them, are false because of the truths that are told to us in verses three to six.

[17:46] And so the false charges against God are dismissed. But imagine if verses three to six weren't there.

We'd be doubtful about whether God could actually deliver. If we didn't have any way of knowing who God really is. God and yet sometimes we don't bother to find out those things.

We don't bother to soak them into our lives. So as Christian people, we have a responsibility, a duty almost, to get to know our God, to go deep into God, to the knowledge of God and find out as much as we can about who he is.

And then when the accuser or anybody else tells us your God will not deliver you, you'll see right through those lies because you'll know him and you'll know all about him.

And non-Christian people, if you are somebody who doesn't have that relationship with God at this time, I'd implore you get to know this God because any other thing that you rely on to help you in times of trouble will at some stage fail.

[19:25] But this God won't. So the first step then is to get to know God and come to him through the Lord Jesus Christ. If you don't know what that means, talk to me or someone else who is a Christian person here this morning and find out.

Because there's a certainty that all of us will face circumstances in which it will feel like God will not deliver, in which we will be tempted to believe that God will not deliver us.

How much better if we are for armed with the knowledge of who God really is. God will not be tempted to believe us.

He will not leave us at the end of verse 6 because he makes the appeal in verse 7. Based on the confidence that he has in his God, the psalmist appeals to him.

The enemies have said God can't deliver, so he appeals to God. God deliver. Arise, O God, using the words of Moses as he lifted the ark.

[20 : 50] Arise, O Lord, may your enemies be scattered, may your foes flee before you. Arise, O God, take action God, and do what they say you can't do.

Deliver. But actually, let's read verse 7, it gets a bit violent, doesn't it? Arise, Lord, deliver me, my God, strike all my enemies on the jaw and break the teeth of the wicked.

My goodness, smash their faces in. It seems a bit graphic and a bit bloodthirsty for us.

But firstly, it's not inciting violence. It's asking God to act. This is God's business. And secondly, let's notice what he's asking God to do.

Hit them in the mouth. Shut them up. Don't let this trash talk be said against you, Lord. Deliver me, but also don't let yourself be dishonoured by this.

[22 : 08] May God not be dishonoured by this sort of talk. See, one of the big issues here is not just that God's person is uncomfortable, but the things that's being said about God, that should never be said.

Our comfort is not the main thing. God's glory is. And so the psalmist moves to verse eight.

From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people. Excuse me. It's explicitly stated in direct contradiction to the charge God will not deliver him.

He says uh-uh. From the Lord comes deliverance. the ones who have maligned God are the ones who are put to shame because God really does deliver.

But there's a problem, isn't there? Because many, many Christians don't see that deliverance.

Many people have died in Guoza, in Syria, in Yemen, in all those places that I mentioned, all those situations, with the taunts still ringing in their ears.

[23 : 41] The scoffers are still scoffing. The accuser of our souls is still prowling around seeking whom he may devour. So God, there's still some doubt, is there?

But there isn't. Because the Lord, from the Lord comes deliverance, and we can be sure of that.

And a day is coming, just as Paul said in the Timothy passage, a day is coming when God's deliverance will be seen by all, and the scoffing mouth will be silenced, almost as graphically and violently as mentioned in verse seven.

What a glorious or a terrible day that will be. So in conclusion, we all face this taunt against God at one time or another.

We all hear it said of ourselves or other people. God will not deliver him. God will not deliver her.

God will not deliver them. And we need to be sure of who God is.

And we need to be convinced of the falsehood, of the implication that he is not there, that he is too weak, or that he is not interested. They're all lies.

[25 : 16] God will be faithful. And we can be confident. We need to have the confidence to call on God and ask him to deliver, to silence the critics so that he is glorified.

And then we need to be patient and wait for his deliverance in full confidence that it will come. And may God's blessing be on his people.

Amen.