

Hear me, keep me, save me

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[0:00] Wonderful, let's pray shall we? Father we want to come to your word now with soft hearts and open ears. So would you help us to understand what your word teaches and help us to live in the light of it. In Jesus name. Amen.

Now as Gareth said we're in the summer of Psalms right throughout August. We're going to be looking at five different Psalms. There'll be Psalms of praise, of preparation and celebration. Now this one now as it says in the heading is a Psalm of prayer and a prayer of David. Sometimes with the Psalms we know the context that they're written in. We don't hear at all.

It's possible as you read the Psalm that you can picture David being chased by Saul before David was made king. Maybe restraining his hand from violence. You'll think of the, remember the incident where David and his men are hiding in a cave.

Saul comes in to relieve himself and there's an opportunity to kill him so David can take the throne he's been promised. But he doesn't. He restrains himself from that.

[1:09] And leaving it up to God to do the work. But David faced threats at other times, sometimes from within his own family, sometimes from other nations. So while it's not clear exactly the situation David is writing about, it's clear that he is in big trouble, isn't it?

He's facing a real threat from determined, ruthless enemies. And rather than trying to sort it out himself, he turns to the Lord. So what we're going to do over the next few minutes is to walk through the Psalm.

I'll make a few points along the way and we'll end where the Psalm does with that thought of seeing God face to face. That's where we're going. Three main chunks. The first one is there in verses one to five.

If you want a heading for that, it is this. Hear me. Hear me. That's how it begins. Hear me, Lord. My plea is just. Listen to my cry. Hear my prayer.

Three times in that opening verse, David asks for God to listen to him. Maybe you think that's a bit of overkill. Could you think of something else, David? Get to the point.

[2:15] But imagine a parent trying to give their child a vital instruction. They're not sure they're listening. So they say, come on, listen. Pay attention. Hear this. Or the other way around.

A child coming to a parent saying, Mum, Dad, please hear. Please listen to me. This is really important. The danger is great here. The need is huge.

David knows how vital it is that God hears him. Only God's help will do. And of course, he's not just asking for the Lord to hear the sound of the word for the image.

When it's about hearing, there's an idea here that if the Lord hears, then he will act. Hear me. Listen to me.

Hear me. There is a sense of deep need and desperation. So here's my first challenge. Are our prayers like that? Do we pray desperate, forceful, determined, passionate prayers?

[3:14] Do we pour out our heart to God like this, seeking that he would listen? Or do we just take for granted that he will? Because I think sometimes we can be emotionally disconnected with the prayers that we make to God.

The words come out. And maybe we feel them a little bit, but there isn't anything deep in our stomach. Maybe it's just to do with that being English. Unless it's the football really. We don't get very passionate about much, do we?

Not really. Not unless it's something we really do care about. But those things seem to be few and far between. But not David. He does care about this situation.

He is desperate. So maybe we should seek God's help to care more. To care more about the state of the church in the nation. About the hardships of those we love.

About the destiny of the lost. About the persecution of our brothers and sisters around the world. Do we pray prayers like this? Because if we don't really care, we're not going to be passionate that God hears.

[4:19] We're not going to plead with him. Do we care? Do we care? Madly. Deeply. Really. David did. He knew his needs. So he cried out to God to hear him.

To hear and to act. We'll come on to what he prayed for in a little while. But let's not be timid. Let's try to push that English reserve away. If our need is great, we can be passionate with God in our words.

Hear me. Listen to me. I need you. If we're a little nervous about praying like David did. Well, then what do we make of the way that he is of his incredible self-confidence about his character and conduct?

Because that is amazing here, isn't it? I wonder if we would ever be so bold as to claim these things for ourselves as a reason why God should hear us. Because what does he say? Well, he says that his mouth is pure, verses 2 and 3.

That his heart is right. That his conduct is good, verse 4. He's not taking bribes. He's not committing violence. All in all, David says to God that he has kept God's commands, verse 4.

[5:27] That he has walked the right path. And he's using that as a justification for God to hear his prayer. And David isn't trying to pull the wool over God's eyes.

He's encouraging God to take a good look and check out his life. Now, I'm a little weird. You probably knew that already. But growing up, I used to love exams.

I know that is a bit odd. But I used to like knowing what I knew. I want to know how good am I? I want something to measure myself against. But the kind of prayer David prays here for God to check him out instantly.

It's the same prayer that he prays at the end of Psalm 139. For God to search him and know his heart. To test him. And know his anxious thoughts. This would be a little bit like a head teacher phoning up Ofsted and saying, I know the inspection's not due for another three or four years. But would you come back in again? Bring your best tea. Spend a couple of weeks with us. Tell us what we're doing wrong. Because any sensible head teacher will know that there are lots of things at a school that could do.

[6:35] There are lots of things at a school that could be better. There always are. There always are. But David says this about his health. About his own heart. David isn't claiming to be righteous and perfect.

He's not claiming divine levels of holiness. What he is saying is, Lord, if you look at my life, you will see that I am listening to your word. That I am putting it into practice.

That I desire to do what is right. That I am different from the people that are out to get me. That's what Job argues in his conversations with God. It's not a declaration of absolute perfection. But that his heart is in the right way. He's got a commitment to living in a way that will please the Lord. That's quite a thing, isn't it?

And he says, Lord, come and check. Listen to my prayer. Check me out. See, I meet lots of people who will tell me their ambitions. But as you look at their lives, you see that their ambition and how they live are very different.

[7:41] Oh, I would love to run a mile in under four minutes. Really? But you haven't even done a 5K yet in under 30 minutes.

Where's your new shoes and your exercise program? We say we want something, but we don't live it out. That isn't true of David. What about us?

What about us? Where is our heart set? Are the patterns of our life and behavior, our ways of speaking, our ambitions, desires, are they evidence that we are truly followers of Christ?

See, our conduct matters. Our words matter. Our hearts matter. And I wonder sometimes if our reticence to pray such bold prayers as David does here.

Hear me. Keep me. Save me. Some of that is, if God is held out there in our prayers, we're not letting him get too close to our hearts. David says to the Lord, come and take a good look.

[8:47] Come and check me out. Come and see what you'll find. And then answer my prayers. See, God already knows what we're like, doesn't he?

We can put on a good front and pretence with people in church, maybe with people in our family, but God knows. So the only person we're failing is ourselves. In fact, the more we try and keep God

at a distance, actually the only person that really hurts is us.

deny ourselves more of the joy and power and peace that having God at work in our lives brings. If we want God to be at more work in us, if we want him to hear and answer our prayers, because there is a link in the scriptures between living a righteous life, having our hearts set on the things of God and God answering those prayers, perhaps because if we are living like this, then we will know what to pray better.

Well, we need to pursue that holiness. Hear me, David says. It's a passionate plea from a man who has already been listening to God.

Here's the second thing he prays, verses 6 to 12. Keep me, keep me, keep me safe, keep me close, keep me secure, keep me, keep me safe from the actions of those wicked people who are really out to get me.

[10 : 16] It starts with a plea for God to listen again in verse 6. And by the way, isn't it amazing that God does listen to us? Sometimes it's hard to get the person on the telephone so you can chat with them about changing your internet provider.

You just go round and round in circles, yet in prayer, you and I come straight into the throne room of God's and our heavenly father listens to us.

That should encourage us to talk to God all the more, shouldn't it? That we have that kind of access. It's an astonishing thing. And the tenderness in David's words in verse 7 and 8 should encourage us as well.

Because in our prayers, we are not praying to a distant and disconnected deity, but to a loving father. And right now, it's clear that David needs his father's presence.

That's why he's honest about his weakness and vulnerability. That phrase in verse 8, keep me as the apple of your eye. It's literally a phrase for the pupil of your eye, that delicate part.

[11 : 18] Those of you that have had eye trouble know how painful your eye can be when something goes wrong with it. Something tiny. But how vulnerable they are. Just a tiny bit of grit.

Just a tiny little scratch. Well, the same way that the eyes are delicate and need protection. So David knows that he needs God's protection. I'm weak, protect me.

I'm delicate, shield me. I'm vulnerable to attack. Will you surround me? That image in verse 8, at the end of the verse, is equally tender. A picture of a bird's wing spreading its wings over its young.

Keeping them safe. Keeping them out of sight. Keeping them close. David is praying for God to keep him. One of you've had times when you've had to pray that kind of prayer.

When you've needed God's presence. When you've needed his arms around you. You've needed his feathers covering you. And as we cry out to God like that, he does hear us.

[12 : 22] He does draw near. In our weakness and our fear. He brings us his peace when we seek him. It's a beautiful thing.

But God's love is not just an abstract thing. It's not just wonderful to behold and extraordinary to contemplate and beautiful to experience. Actually, it comes clothed in flesh and bone.

It's not just there to cuddle and comfort. But to save. And to save through might. Through sword and love and mercy. Through nail pierced hands and feet, ultimately. That's why in the midst of his time of dire need.

David asks for a fresh outpouring of God's love. Because he knows that God's love is mighty and strong. He's not just asking for a warm feeling.

He wants God's love to be shown in action. He knows from his history that it was God's love that redeemed Israel from slavery. That God's love provided food for them in the desert.

[13 : 26] That God's love took them into the promised lands. God's love isn't just a feeling. It's a mighty force. Hence, show me the wonders of your great love. Show me your love in action, Lord.

And that's vitally important. Because right now, David is facing a real threat, isn't he? They are out to take his life. Look at the way they're described in verses 9 to 12.

They are callous. They are arrogant, boastful. They're like a lion who's been stalking them. Now waiting to attack. They have planned it.

They have tracked him down. His life is in real danger. The final phrase in verse 11 is one of those that commentators wrestle with. The Hebrew is very uncertain.

Literally, it talks about a tent being thrown down. Except tents don't get thrown down, do they? They get pitched out. They get pegged out. Stretched. So David could be saying that his enemies are after him to gain power and stretch out their force, their influence over the world.

[14:31] Or it could be something more brutal in him. It's that David is fearing that he is going to be pegged out. Maybe not nailed to a cross, but nailed to the ground.

Stretched out. Utterly vulnerable. Overcome. Neither of those pictures is very good. The danger level is high, which is why David cries out for protection.

For God's love to be shown in strong, purposeful action. No wonder David cries out to the Lord, would you keep me? Would you keep me?

I guess unlike our brothers and sisters in large parts of Pakistan and Iran and Nigeria, many other places, you and I are never going to face this kind of physical threat because of our trust in God. But there will be times when we reach the end of our human strength and resources. When other things come crowding in and may threaten to pull us down and destroy our lives.

[15:30] And we think, Lord, I'm on the verge of crumbling here. Would you keep me? So we need to know we can pray this kind of prayer. The kind of prayer that a desperate child who sees their need prays to their heavenly father.

That his great love would be shown in clothing them in this, surrounding them with his divine love and power, acting to bring them safe in battle and storm.

You might not need this prayer today, but you can pray it. So store it up, write it down, file it away. One day you might need to say, Father, I know you love me.

I know you showed that most perfectly on the cross. I am yours. You are mine. You're my father. So come in now. Rescue me. Keep me. Because my life is on the brink.

I can't do this alone. Can you hold on to that prayer? File it away till you need it. Hear me. Keep me. Lastly, verses 13 to 15.

[16:37] Save me. Save me. Rise up, Lord. Confront them. Bring them down. With your sword, rescue me from the wicked. By your hand, save me from such people, Lord, from those of this world whose reward is in this life.

When I was a primary school teacher, there was a beginning to be a movement among some of my colleagues that traditional sports days were doing damage to soft, delicate children.

So instead of having rosettes for first, second and third, some schools near us, not ours, fortunately, decided that they would give prizes to all the children who competed.

And a big well done. Everyone got a sticker. No one was singled out. Now that's fine for little ones.

It is always amazing when a four-year-old child can run 30 metres in a straight line without stopping or going off to wave to their parents or just falling over or just going, oh, there's a daisy, I'm going to stop and look at that.

For four-year-olds, it's great. But life isn't like that, is it? In every other part of life, there are winners, people who come first. And we know that in job interviews, in sports, and of course in times of violence and war as well.

[17:51] And the more serious the threat, the firmer the response has got to be. Negotiations may be fine, but if they don't work, or if you find yourself face-to-face with an enemy who is hell-bent on your annihilation, there can be no compromise.

And sometimes the victory over evil may have to be as bloody as the victory the evildoers had hoped to win. It's just the way of the world. And David is okay with that.

If we're especially squeamish or maybe a committed pacifist, we might try to say that the sword in verse 13 is just a metaphor. But given the way David fought, the way he speaks about evildoers in other Psalms, I think we're going to be stretching the point there.

Because David is clearly praying for his enemies to be defeated. Clearly, permanently. They're seeking his life. They're perhaps seeking the lives of his men as well.

The languages can be read in a plural way here. So he is quite happy for those who are seeking his life to lose their lives. But notice he doesn't want to do it himself.

[19:04] Did you notice that? If this Psalm is about being hunted by Saul, David went out of his way numerous times not to do Saul any harm whilst praying that God would act.

David asked God to deal with his enemies, presumably because he knows that God will always act with righteousness and justice. The rest of verse 4 seems much harsher still, doesn't it?

May what you have stalled up for the wicked fill their bellies. May their children gorge themselves on it and may there be leftovers for their little ones. Now, if that is the right translation, again, my commentaries have said that this is a notoriously difficult piece of Hebrew, it would suggest that David wants the children and perhaps even the grandchildren of his enemies to face the same kind

of defeat.

So there is no one left to come after him later. Now, that is, may seem brutal to us, but that was common practice in many, not just in that age, but for many, many centuries afterwards.

Even today, if you find yourself as an enemy of the state, perhaps you're a Christian living in China, it is not just you that will find punishment, but your whole family that will be dealt with.

[20 : 24] That is brutal, but it was the way for leaders like David to ensure that there is no one left to carry out the grudge of vengeance against them. Now, as Christians this morning, how should we feel about praying that kind of prayer?

After all, Jesus prayed for his enemies to be forgiven, didn't he? Told us to turn the other cheek for us to follow his example. Is this kind of prayer okay for Christians?

Well, I think we still might be able to pray for salvation and victory if we find ourselves in this, facing this kind of violent threat. I think it's okay to pray for the wicked and all enemies of Christ's church to be brought up to face God's justice.

But like David, we need to leave those things up to him to deal with. Unlike other religions, Christianity is not a religion of the sort. We are to be a people of peace and we should be doing all we can to bring those outside of God's kingdom to know the peace and forgiveness of God so that they do not have to face his eternal justice.

wonderful, David pointed forward to Jesus in many psalms, but of course he lived before Jesus, before the cross, before Jesus' sacrifice where the judgment, that God's judgment on sin was taken upon God the Son himself so that the wicked and ungodly and the murderers and persecutors might find forgiveness and new life.

[22 : 00] That means in our personal lives, you and I have a different drumbeat to march to, a different pattern to follow. I'm not talking here about the role of state and government, that's a different matter.

But in our own personal lives, maybe like David, we can pray these things but we must leave them up to God. Pray that God's justice will come.

But as I said, this is a notoriously difficult passage. So one of the commentators I read pointed to the fact that verse 14 can be translated in a very different way.

In fact, if you've got one of the original NIV Bibles at home, you'll find that translation there. There's not a huge amount of difference between the new NIV and the old NIV, but this verse is one of them.

So the different translation reads like this. You still the hunger of those you cherish. Their sons have plenty. They store up their wealth for their children. As for me, I will be vindicated and see your face and that it finishes in the same way.

[23 : 05] So instead of a call for greater victory, this other translation makes the verse a moment of praise as David reflects on the goodness of God to the children of the righteous and expresses his confidence that God has heard his prayer and that whatever happens, that is whether he lives or dies, whether he wins or loses this fight, he will have been finally vindicated and one day he will see God face to face.

See, David's enemies are earthbound. They've got no thought for eternity. They've got no final hope beyond this life. But David's hope is based there in the God who is eternal.

So in this particular battle, win or lose, he wins. Live or die, he wins. Earthly vindication or being captured by those seeking his life, David is going to win in the end.

He's like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego before Nebuchadnezzar saying, yes, you can stick us in the fire. God can save us. But even if he doesn't, that's where my trust is.

That's where my trust is. That is a wonderful, deep, glorious kind of trust here. It's, David has this certain eternal hope, a hope for eternity that changes the way he can deal with this situation.

[24 : 32] situation now. He's surrounded by such a foe and yet he prays for victory that God will bring. Not the one he needs to work out himself.

And no matter what happens, his eyes are on the Lord's. Have you got that kind of hope yourself? That whether you live or die, you are safe in his hands?

That whether your life is one of success or failure, actually everything that really matters, it's kept in the glorious presence and hands of God.

Because this is where we're going to finish. Because one day, as the psalm points us to, we will come face to face with God. We will see him in all his glory.

For those who are in Christ, those who love him and adore him, those who have sought to keep their hearts right, their lips pure, their life in step with God's command. I tell you, that moment when we see God face to face will be the most beautiful moment we have ever had.

[25:42] At that point, God will call us his good and faithful servants. He will welcome us into his presence forever. Not because we have been perfect, but because Jesus was perfect. And through the saving work of Christ, we have been brought in and kept and saved.

A sign of what will happen when we see God face to face will be where our hearts are at right now. If in obedience to and fellowship with God through Jesus is something we really desire, well, we can be confident that one day we will have that.

That the Lord who has planted that seed of faith in us will complete that work on that great day. And what a day it will be. But just as in this psalm there are those who David prays will be defeated.

So on that final day too there will be those who are left out. Those who will not receive such a welcome. Those for whom when they see God face to face they will want to shrink and run from his presence.

Those who have fought against Christ and his church. Those who have rejected his offer of forgiveness. Those who have denied him and disowned him will find themselves cast aside.

[27:02] Kept in a place where they have chosen for themselves shut out of God's presence forever. And as in this psalm there is no middle ground. We're either on the side of the king or we're a part of the rebellion against him.

And on that day it will be too late. But today isn't too late. Today isn't too late. Today we can choose whose side we're on.

Today we can ask that the Holy Spirit search our hearts. Shows us our sin and rebellion and brings us to Jesus. Today we can turn if we're not there already from being an enemy of the king of kings to one of his children who is waiting to see him face to face when all the battles of this life will be over.

The bread and wine on the table behind me are going to remind us of what that invitation cost.

Remind us in tangible ways of the height, depth and breadth of God's love for us.

So if you're outside this morning come on in. If you're inside stand firm and pray. Pray to be heard. Pray to be kept.

[28:14] and pray to be saved both on that last day and on every day in between. May God hear our prayers. Amen.