

Sermon 10, Really Trusting the Judge's Righteousness, Psalm 7

Proposition: The king has perfect confidence in God's justice, both for his enemies and for himself.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this evening to the seventh psalm. For many of us, I think, this psalm appears to raise the question of works. David asks to be judged according to his righteousness, and that immediately triggers us. What? Is the king of Israel some kind of Roman Catholic, trusting in his own righteousness before God? But as I hope to show you tonight, that framing gets it exactly backwards. The question the psalm raises is not the question of works, but the question of faith. The king singing this psalm has perfect confidence in the justice of God. He trusts God to deal righteously with his enemies. I hope we all share that same confidence. But then he takes it a step farther, and affirms that he equally trusts God to deal righteously with him! The king is not trusting in his own righteousness, but in God's. Part of that righteousness is to justly evaluate the king and to see that he is perfectly righteous, with uncompromised integrity. And of course, though we are not as righteous as our perfect King, we have been made righteous in Him and we have the same need to trust in God's righteous judgment — of our king, of our enemies, and of ourselves. Be like your king, for He had perfect confidence in God's justice both for his enemies and for himself.

I. The King Takes Refuge in His God, vv. 1-8

I have broken the psalm into three points, but it really could have just been two. There is little practical difference between taking refuge in God and putting confidence in God. But in any case, the outline is simply a framework to help us wrap our mind around the psalm as a whole. This is a psalm of faith in action.

A. Save Me, vv. 1-2

The first action that faith takes is prayer. I can hardly emphasize this enough. We often think of faith's first action as obedience. That's not far wrong. But if you trust God, then perhaps even

before you obey Him you will cry out to Him. That is certainly true in cases like the one in front of us. The title tells us that David cried to God in this way after he heard words from a man named Cush from the tribe of Benjamin. Now, Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and Saul was David's mortal enemy. Therefore, Benjamin in general had a hard time with David. I trust all of that background is in your mind. The psalm tells us that Cush had falsely accused David of something. So the situation that prompts this psalm is a situation of slander from a racial, ethnic, and/or political enemy. David has been lied about. Now, the first thing that the faithful king does in this situation is not to obey God harder — "If only I were more faithful I would be less slandered!" He doesn't say that, nor does Scripture tell us that that ought to be our first thought. Obviously if you walk in unfaithfulness all the time and someone calls you out for it, that's not slander. Or, if you walk in unfaithfulness and someone does slander you, then yes, you should clean up your act. But that's not because of the slander. It's because the Lord doesn't want you to be unfaithful!

The king has been lied about. And his first action is to take it to the Lord in prayer. He affirms the key statement on which the whole psalm turns: "O Adonai my God, I have taken refuge in you." The psalm is about taking refuge. That means hiding from slander. The king speaks in a metaphor taken from entering a physical fortress. If a bunch of Benjamites are pursuing you with arrows and swords, and you enter a stone tower that is strongly built, then they can shoot arrows at it all day long, but none of the arrows will hurt you. You are safely tucked away behind thick stone walls. Well, God is that strong tower. To take refuge in Him means to trust that He will deal with the false words spoken about you. To take refuge in Him is to place your confidence in His salvation. That's exactly where the king takes it: He says that he wants God to save him. That is a practical way of taking refuge. Cush and his friends are attacking David verbally, and David prays for God's salvation. That means, as the rest of the Psalm makes clear, that God would vindicate David and show that Cush was actually lying the whole time. David is not guilty of the thing of which he has been accused. More broadly, we can say that Jesus is not guilty of the crime of leading people's allegiance away from Caesar.

The king goes on to describe the slander very graphically. To be slandered is like being torn and dragged away by a lion — and being totally on your own, with no one to protect or help you fight off the beast.

Those of you who have dealt with slander know exactly what the king is talking about here. The Lord's Anointed faced many situations like this. And his psalm shows us that more than anything, faith in God is necessary in these situations. God will vindicate His Anointed against slanders. And by the same token, those who are united to Christ by faith will also be vindicated against slander.

B. If I'm Guilty, Let Him Get Me, vv. 3-5

The king goes on to utter a much more startling petition. We expect our king to walk in faith. We know that he is ready and willing to trust God in any situation, no matter how dark. But the form that trust takes is rather shocking. He calls on God by name once again and says "If I did the things Cush has slanderously accused me of, let me be trampled in the dust."

Have you ever been actually trampled? Perhaps you've been lying on the floor, playing with your children, when one of them has planted a heel squarely in your chest and knocked the wind right out of you. It doesn't feel good. But the king trusts God so completely to vindicate him that he actually says "If I'm guilty, let them trample me in the dust." He specifically references the destruction of his glory. Let my glory be covered in dust, trodden down in the mire of the streets.

Now, if there is a physical opposite of glory, it would be mud and dust. No matter who you are, you don't look good when you're covered in mud. No matter how glorious something is, if it's thrown down and trampled in the dust, most of its glory is gone. We could imagine the Mona Lisa thrown down and trampled in the mud. One of the greatest artworks of all time would be a whole lot less glorious after such an experience.

In Psalm 4, the king rebuked those who would turn his glory into shame. Now he positively invites them to do it, on condition that they prove him guilty of actually doing the wicked thing he's been slandered about. He specifically mentions a couple of crimes: repaying evil to a friend, and plundering an enemy without just and lawful cause. We could generalize these crimes to repaying evil for good, and to repaying evil for evil. God specifically forbids both of these things. "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone" (1Th 5:15). "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men" (Rom 12:17). In fact, the apostle counsels a few verses later, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21 NAS).

The king says that he has not repaid evil for evil, and that he has certainly not treated with evil someone who had been good to him. Cush had presumably alleged both of these things about David. Cush was lying. And the king is willing to put his own life and his own glory on the line to defend his innocence.

Yes, in a certain sense the king has confidence in his own righteousness — not in general, but in this particular instance. But if you read the whole psalm, you see that his own uprightness in the matter of allegedly repaying evil for evil has not been a defense. He has still been mercilessly slandered by Cush.

The king therefore goes to God and seeks His vindication. Innocence is not enough to protect you from false accusations. In fact, in a certain sense innocence is the precondition for false accusations.

Your king trusts in God like this. This is a worked example of the Biblical command to let God repay and take vengeance. How do you go about doing that? By doing what the king does in this psalm. You walk in innocence, and when falsely accused, you go to God and ask Him to vindicate you.

C. Adjudicate Between Him and Me, vv. 6-8

Of course, the king does not stop there. This is not a milquetoast prayer, saying "O Lord, please vindicate me and also let Cush and his friends prosper and succeed at everything they do." One of the things Cush and his friends do is dog the footsteps of the Lord's Anointed and reproach

Him at every turn. You cannot pray for God to save His King and for Cush to succeed, because Cush's stated goal is to destroy God's King.

And so, because he is the Lord's Anointed and he needs to succeed and he needs to be righteous, the king prays for God to judge Cush and all his ilk. He asks God to get up off His throne — a fairly frequent petition in these psalms. Get off your throne, O Lord, and hold court in front of the assembly of the peoples.

In other words, the king prays for God to convene the heavenly court in the sight of all the nations and there to openly render judgment against the rage of all the enemies of the Lord's King. Back in Ps 2 the Father set His Son as king in Zion. Yet though the Son of God rules in Zion, he continues to be slandered and attacked by the furious nations that rage against Him and His Father. And so He asks His Father to convene the court and there to vindicate Him and to condemn Cush and all of the enemies of the Lord's Anointed.

Do you have this kind of faith when you've been slandered? Again, there are two messages here and you need to hear them both. The first message is that the king had and has this faith in your place. He has perfect confidence in God; in the LORD he takes refuge, without remainder. But the other message is that you need to be like your king. Just as he learned to take refuge in the Lord, you need to learn the same lesson. Figure out how to put yourself in the Lord's keeping. As God to bring about the day of final judgment. After all, that is part of what you're praying when you say "Thy Kingdom come." That petition is just like Ps 7, asking for God to openly condemn the enemies of His Anointed and to vindicate those united to His Anointed.

Again, the psalm is not about works, but about faith. The king asks by faith for God to judge the peoples, the wicked peoples who throw off the bands of Yahweh and His Anointed — but in the same breath, he asks God to judge him. And he asks that God would notice specifically his righteousness and integrity. Again, the lesson here is that the Son of God has perfect righteousness and integrity. But in union with Him, you can as well. You can be innocent when you are slandered. You can be falsely accused of repaying evil for good. The psalm is not about you in the first instance, but about the king. But you are in union with the king, identified with the king, and so what is true of Him is your confidence. It is also supposed to become true of you through the Spirit who conforms you to the image of the Son.

II. The King Puts Confidence in His God, vv. 9-16

The king not only asks for God to judge and vindicate him as He judges the peoples; He goes on to make specific petitions about ending the evil of the wicked and establishing the righteousness of the righteous. Those petitions appear back to back, and then most of the rest of the psalm describes how God will answer those petitions. The petitions are both uttered, and then the psalmist describes both answers.

A. Petition: End the Evil of the Wicked, v. 9a

The first petition is almost a sort of backup petition, or a prayer for an emergency injunction that will grant temporary relief in the period that must yet elapse before the final judgment in the presence of all the nations. While we are waiting for that day when the wicked's evil will be

permanently cut off, please, Lord, let their evil come to an end! Stop them now, stop them in their tracks, make their evil cease!

B. Petition: Establish the Righteous, v. 9b

The second petition is that God would establish the righteous. To establish means to set something up firmly so that it cannot be shaken. The wicked's goal is to shake the righteous. The wicked want to ruin or corrupt the righteous if at all possible. The opposite of that is what the king is asking for here. And in this plural "righteous," you can see that your king prays for you. Just as he prays against the wicked, so he prays for all the righteous. He asks that God would make you to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

These petitions are backed up with a statement about God: He tests the hearts and minds. In other words, He knows exactly who the righteous are and who the wicked are. He knows what each group is thinking and doing. He alone can sort precisely between the righteous and the wicked. The two groups seem to bleed into each other at the edges, according to human judgment and human insight. Some professing saints are worse than some professing enemies. But the righteous God reads the heart infallibly and will judge righteously, both today in ending the wicked's evil temporarily and at the last judgment in permanently stopping it.

C. Answer: God Judges and Saves Righteously, vv. 10-11a

The king then immediately describes how God is going to answer the petition about establishing the righteous. He says that God saves the upright in heart. That is the first way in which the Almighty answers this prayer. It speaks, of course, to the whole first part of the psalm, in which the king asks God to save him and adds, "I am upright in heart." I told you this psalm is about faith. We know that God the searcher of hearts knows whose hearts are upright — and that He saves those people. More specifically, He saves that person, for that person is His Son. In the next psalm, we will hear about the greatness of man, and the original creation vision of man under God ruling the entire planet and indeed, the entire creation. He has put all things under our feet! But then we have five psalms in a row that emphasize the universal prevalence of the wicked. This series culminates in Ps 14's statement that there is none righteous, no, not one. Thank God it is answered in Ps 15 by the reminder that there is one Righteous One who is able to ascend the mountain and dwell in the presence of God. In Him, and through Him, all things will eventually be put under the feet of man. We'll examine these things in more detail in the weeks to come. But for now, just see that the first part of God's answer to the petition for the establishing of the righteous is a statement that God saves His Anointed. Jesus will be delivered. He is the one who is truly upright in heart, and He has perfect faith in His Father's deliverance! Because Jesus has taken us into union with Himself by faith, we too have faith in our Father's deliverance. We too look for God to save us. We too see Him as our shield, rather than as a sword to attack us. But as v. 12 points out, the one who does not want to take refuge in the perfect, upright-hearted Messiah is not going to find God a shield, but rather a sword and a bow and a keen arrow. Don't go join the wicked! Yes, your King had faith in your place and obeyed in your place. But if you take your stand with the wicked, you will fall.

D. Answer: God Sends Poetic Justice on the Wicked, vv. 11b-16

That's because in addition to reading the heart, the Almighty is a perfectly righteous judge. The whole psalm has presupposed this truth, of course. But the king comes right out and says it now. God is righteous in everything He does, including in His judgments on the king and on the people and peoples of the earth.

That righteousness is manifested in the anger of God, an anger that He feels every day. Verse four already called on God to stand up in His anger. In fact, the previous Psalm revealed that God is more than happy to rebuke even the king in His anger. Now the king says again that God is angry. He does not look idly on wrong, whatever Habbakkuk may have accused Him of. When God sees the kind of evil that Cush was engaging in, He reacts against it.

What does it mean for God to be angry? We cannot understand this in human terms, as God suffering from a passion that masters Him and makes Him do things He wouldn't otherwise do. That is not what the Almighty's rage looks like. Rather, other names for His anger are "love" and "zeal." God delights in His Anointed One and in His people more generally. When Cush and the other enemies of God attack His Anointed, He responds with anger. That is, He is moved, aroused, engaged, and enraged. He is not out of control; He is perfectly controlled. This is not the icy anger of a malicious human being. It is described throughout Scripture as hot anger. But it is still righteous anger, anger that refuses to be put off or assuaged or mollified with anything less than the full punishment the wicked deserve.

The king tells us how God's anger is worked out against the wicked. He attacks them with sword, bow, deadly weapons, and fiery shafts. This is the kind of anger that is not averse to picking up an AR-15. God is not subject to passion in the sense that He is passively moved by a feeling that's bigger than His ability to control it. But He is most certainly passionate and impassioned in a way that is completely compatible with perfect love and perfect self-control. In His anger, He picks up deadly weapons to deal with the ravings of Cush and the other enemies of His Anointed.

Yet — it does not say that God as the divine warrior then creates a bloodbath. He doesn't arise and massacre the wicked. Instead, much of the time His anger against them takes the form of poetic justice.

The king gives us a one-sentence description of Cush, comparing the wicked Benjamite to a pregnant woman giving birth to mischief and falsehood and wickedness. Cush loves his slanders as much as a mother loves her child. Cush puts as much work into his evil-doing as a mother puts into her pregnancies.

But God takes those evil plots of Cush and the other enemies of His King, and He makes them backfire. The king gives us two pictures: The wicked falls into the pit he's dug, and his violence falls on his own head. One thinks of the Emperor Julian the Apostate, killed in battle by the Persians because of his overweening hubris. One thinks of the plot against Paul, and all those men who died of thirst because of their rash vows. One thinks, above all, of the plot against the Lord's Anointed at the crucifixion. That was supposed to finish off the heir so that the wicked tenants could enjoy the vineyard in peace. Instead, it was the beginning of the end for them.

Their violence against Jesus culminated in the Roman state's destruction of their place and their nation.

This, too, is the king's faith talking. He is certain of the judgments of God, whether exercised "naturally" or "supernaturally." Nothing is more natural than to walk into your own hole. I did it once, and nearly broke my leg. Decades ago, my dad installed a couple of extra-large hydrants in the yard. They supplied water with a two-inch line instead of the standard three-quarter inch line. I took that two-inch hose and sprayed it right at the lawn, digging an eight-inch deep hole that is there to this day. One night, while playing tag in the semidarkness, I stepped in that hole. I can still feel the jar that it gave me. That is how God works. The wicked plant and tend the seeds of their own destruction.

Do you believe that, because you believe that God is angry every day? That He is a righteous judge? Do you really, actually trust the judge and His judgments, both in your case and in your enemies'?

III. The King Sings Praise to His God, v. 17

If you do, you will be like your king, who is the ultimate worshiper. He sings praise to His God. He gives thanks to God.

He doesn't say "I'll give myself a pat on the back for my integrity." He gives all the praise to God, the same God in whom he trusts without a fear.

If you had the faith your king has, you would have the worship your king has. It runs the other direction too: If you worship like your king does, you will find that your faith in the God who judges will correspondingly grow.

So learn Psalms and sing them. Sing praise to the God who judges and vindicates, first His king, and then His people. Amen.