

Prayer for Protection

Text: Psalm 17:1-15

Introduction:

1. The Author of the Psalm: David is cited as the author. This Psalm is specifically called a "Prayer of David". Four other Psalms have the word 'prayer' in their titles. Psalms 86 and 142 are also prayers of David. Psalm 90 is entitled "A Prayer of Moses" and Psalm 102 is "A Prayer of the afflicted". "David would not have been a man after God's own heart, if he had not been a man of prayer. He was a master in the sacred art of supplication." (Spurgeon)
2. Occasion: No specifics are given concerning the occasion of writing but there were multiple periods of danger in David's life that could qualify (E.g., when he was fleeing from Saul).
3. Theme: David is crying out to the Lord for vindication and protection from his enemies. "Conscious of his own uprightness but surrounded by enemies whose portion is in this life only, the Psalmist prays to be kept from the evil world oppressing him, confident that he will see the abundant favor of the LORD." (Ross) Spurgeon notes, "The smell of the furnace is upon the present Psalm, but there is evidence in the last verse that he who wrote it came unharmed out of the flame. We have in the present plaintive song, An Appeal to Heaven from the persecutions of earth. A spiritual eye may see Jesus here."
4. Christ in this Psalm: Christ can be seen in this Psalm as the only One who can truly say "thou has tried me, and shalt find nothing". "Everywhere in the Psalms we see Christ. Psalm 17 is Christ's prayer for deliverance from His enemies (Vs. 1-14) and His hope for resurrection glory (Vs. 15)." (Cloud)
5. The Psalm presents a complete petition so is somewhat difficult to divide into sections but we have divided it into 5 parts for this expository study.

David prays,

I. LORD, ACQUIT ME (VS. 1-4)

David pleads his integrity before the high court of heaven. He cries out to God for justice in his situation.

A. The Intercession of the Plea (Vs. 1-2)

1. Its fervency (Vs. 1). David's prayer is passionate and heartfelt. The fervency of his prayer is expressed in three ways:
 - a. "**Hear** the right, O LORD" – The word 'right' means "righteous". David is appealing to the Judge of all the earth to hear his righteous case.
 - b. "**Attend** unto my cry"
 - c. "**Give ear** unto my prayer"
 - d. Note: The Psalmist's plea for God to hear him is not a prayer of doubt. It is an expression of his earnestness in prayer. It conveys an urgency for an answer. "The three imperatives "hear", "attend", "give ear" strike a note of urgency for his vindication in the face of severe opposition." (Ross)

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2. Its focus (Vs. 2). David desires that God would give a Divine ruling on his situation; that he would dispense justice from His throne.
 - a. "Let my sentence forth from thy presence" – the word 'sentence' means "judgment". The Psalmist's enemies were treating him unjustly and viciously so he takes his appeal to the highest courtroom in the universe and asks that God would dispense justice from His sovereign throne.
 - b. "let thine eyes behold the things that are equal" - The term 'equal' refers to what is right, fitting, or appropriate. (Ross)

B. The Integrity behind the Plea (Vs. 3-4)

David was on praying ground because of his blameless life. He was not claiming sinless perfecting but in the battles he was facing he was innocent. He was on the right side of the battle! His life was characterized by:

1. Guilelessness (Vs. 1b) His prayer was not coming from 'feigned' (deceitful, hypocritical) lips. He is speaking the truth. Spurgeon writes, "Lips of deceit are detestable to a man and much more to God. In intercourse so hallowed as that of prayer, hypocrisy even in the remotest degree is as fatal as it is foolish. Hypocritical piety is a double iniquity. He would feign and flatter had better try his craft with a fool like himself, for to deceive the all-seeing One is as impossible as to take the moon in a net, or to lead the sun into a snare. He who would deceive God is himself already most grossly deceived."
2. Blamelessness (Vs. 3) His blameless life is demonstrated in:
 - a. God's proving of his life (Vs. 3a). God knew everything about David. Three verbs are used to express how thoroughly God knows him – 'proved', 'visited' and 'tried'. The words are commonly used for spiritual testing and examining.
 - i. "Thou hast proved mine heart" – God knew his inner thoughts, not just his outward actions.
 - ii. "Thou hast visited me in the night" – God knew every part of his life, seen and unseen.
 - iii. "Thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing" – David is confident of his innocence before God. Note: We see Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of this verse. Truly only His life could be closely examined and "nothing" of sin or error be found (1 Jn. 3:5).
 - b. David's purpose for his life (Vs. 3b). David's godly resolve was that he would not dishonour God with his mouth. That is a godly resolve and one we should take more seriously as believers! Read James 3. Pray the prayer of Psalm 141:3 "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."
3. Faithfulness (Vs. 4). David continues his testimony of his integrity before God. He had maintained a life of separation from the paths of evil men
 - a. The specifics of his separated life – he had maintained a life of separation from the "paths of the destroyer". The word 'destroyer' means 'violent'. David had kept out of the company of violent, destructive men. Satan is the ultimate 'destroyer'

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(John 8:44). His paths of dark depravity are no place for the born again, blood washed child of God.

- b. The secret to his separated life – “by the word of thy lips”. The Word of God was what had preserved David from straying into the paths of evil. “This Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book.” Spurgeon writes, “He had kept the highway of Scripture, and not chosen the bye-paths of malice. We should soon imitate the example of the worst of men if the grace of God did not use the Word of God as the great preservation from evil. “That heavenly Book which lies neglected on many a shelf is the only guide for those who would avoid the enticing and entangling mazes of sin; and it is the best means of preserving the youthful pilgrim from ever treading those dangerous ways.”

II. LORD, UPHOLD ME (VS. 5-7)

Continuing with the theme of ‘paths’, the Psalmist prays for God to preserve him in the paths of righteousness (See Ps. 23:3). We must not only refrain from the wrong paths but walk in the right paths!

A. Uphold me in my Goings (Vs. 5-6)

1. The focus of the petition (Vs. 5)
 - a. “hold up” – means to sustain, maintain; to hold in an erect position.
 - b. “my goings” – “my steps”.
 - c. “thy paths” – the paths are good as they are the ways of God. But David knew his own potential to trip up even while attempting to walk in the good and right ways of the Lord.
 - d. “that my footsteps slip not” – the word ‘slip’ is often translated ‘moved’ in the O.T. David had a holy fear of his potential to be moved out of the ways of God or of the potential of dishonouring the Lord on account of his own weaknesses and frailty. “Slip up in God’s ways? Yes! The road is good but our feet are evil, and therefore can slip, even on the King’s highway.” (Spurgeon)
 - e. Psalm 37:23-24 “The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD **upholdeth *him with his hand.***”
 - f. Jude 1:24-25 “Now unto him that is able to **keep you from falling**, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”
2. The faith of the petition (Vs. 6)
 - a. The Psalmist interrupts his petition with a statement of his confidence in his God. Faith has quickened his prayer. He knows God will hear and answer.
 - b. On the basis of that faith, he prays about for God to incline his ear to him and hear him. The phrase “incline thine ear” is an anthropomorphic expression meaning “listen very closely”. (Ross)

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B. Uphold me by your Grace (Vs. 7)

1. The display of God's lovingkindness – "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness"
 - a. 'marvellous' = The word 'marvelous' means 'separate' with the sense of setting it apart as unique (Ross). It signifies "set apart: different; distinguished". What a true description of God's mercy and grace! It stands apart. It is unique. There is nothing like it in all the universe.
 - b. 'lovingkindness' – the Hebrew word frequently translated 'mercy', 'kindness' and 'lovingkindness' in the O.T.
2. The description of the God of lovingkindness – "O thou that savest by thy right hand"

III. LORD, PROTECT ME (VS. 8-12)

A. The Pictures of the Lord's Protection (Vs. 8)

1. Keep me – "keep me as the apple of the eye".
 - a. The word 'keep' means "to hedge about, guard".
 - b. The "apple of the eye" refers to the pupil. The eye is arguably the most sensitive organ of the body and one we instinctively protect. The pupil is the centre of that tenderness.
 - c. David is asking God to protect him just as one instinctively treasures the apple of his eye. As man zealously guards his eyes, so God earnestly protects those who trust Him.
2. Hide me – "hide me under the shadow of thy wings". David employs the beautiful picture of a mother bird who shelters her chicks under her wings. Psalm 91:4 "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth *shall be thy* shield and buckler."

B. The Portrayal of the Psalmist's Enemies (Vs. 9-12)

The Psalmist now gives a detailed description of the enemy he faces, adding weight and urgency to his plea.

1. They oppress cruelly (Vs. 9a). The idea in the word 'oppress' is that of being wasted, desolated, destroyed, as a city or country is by the ravages of war (Barnes).
2. They surround sinisterly (Vs. 9b). They are further described as "deadly enemies" who seek to surround David. For David his actual life was under threat. This can happen to the believer in this life but the higher application is that the devil actively seeks to destroy our Christian testimony.
3. They live indulgently (Vs. 10a). The phrase "enclosed in fat" points to the self-indulgent lifestyle of the wicked. Wealth is often accompanied by excessive self-indulgence. The fact they are "inclosed" in their fat indicates they are indifferent to the needs of others. Barnes explains, "The meaning here is, that they were prosperous, and that they were consequently self-confident and proud, and were regardless of others. The phrase occurs several times as descriptive of the wicked in a state of prosperity, and as, therefore, insensible to the rights, the wants, and the sufferings of others." (See Deut. 32:15; Ps. 73:7; 119:70)

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4. They speak proudly (Vs. 10b). Their position of advantage in this life gives them a proud sense of entitlement. They are characterized by arrogance. "He who adores himself will have no heart to adore the Lord." (Spurgeon)
5. They stalk predatorily (Vs. 11-12) This aspect of their character is described in four lines:
 - a. "They have now compassed us in our steps" – the picture is of a hunter or wild beast who stalks the path of its victim looking for an opportunity to pounce. He is watching for a careless step or wandering feet.
 - b. "they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth" – they are focused on their destructive goals. Barnes explains, "As those do who are intent on any thing; as the lion does that is seeking its prey. They looked keenly and directly at the object. They did not allow their eyes to wander. They were not indifferent to the object of their pursuit." Spurgeon adds, "Trapp wittily explains this metaphor by an allusion to a bull when about to run at its victim; he lowers his head, looks downward, and then concentrates all his force in the dash which he makes. It most probably denotes the malicious jealousy with which the enemy watches the steps of the righteous; as if they studied the ground on which they trod, and searched after some wrong footmark to accuse them for the past, or some stumbling stone to cast in their future path to trip in days to come." The world and the devil are not halfhearted in its goal to damage the believer! You better not be half hearted about spiritual warfare and victory!
 - c. "Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey" – they are like a hungry lion in search of its prey.
 - d. "as it were a young lion lurking in secret places" – they are like a young lion, full of energy, sitting in its hiding place ready to pounce.
 - e. This description is true of:
 - i. The Evil One (Satan) – 1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"
 - ii. Evil men – there are wicked people in this world who reflect the predatory behaviour of their master the devil. We need God's protection from such individuals. 2. Thess. 3:2 "And that we may be delivered from **unreasonable** and **wicked** men: for all *men* have not faith."

IV. LORD, DEFEND ME (VS. 13-14)

David prays:

A. Defeat the Enemy (Vs. 13)

1. "Arise, O LORD" – David prays that the Lord will move in power against his enemies.
2. "disappoint him" – the word 'disappoint' means "be beforehand with him, outwit and outrun him." (Spurgeon) The word means "to project one's self, that is, to precede, anticipate. David is praying that God

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would foil the enemy's plan before he had a chance to put it into action.

3. "cast him down" – prostrate him. The picture is of the defeat of the enemy before the conqueror. What a glorious sight will it be to behold Satan prostrate beneath the foot of our glorious Lord.

B. Deliver from the Enemy (Vs. 13b-14)

The Psalmist renews his plea for deliverance from the enemy and further describes them as:

1. Finite men – "thy sword...thy hand". The sovereignty of God over the wicked is emphasized in these phrases. God can even use the wicked to accomplish his purposes. Further, they are under his control and he can move them out of the way as easily as one moves his hand. Flanigan writes, "men of the world become, unwittingly, the sword and the hand of Jehovah in the working out of His purpose, and He can remove them as easily as a man moves his hand. So has God used Emperors and Caesars, Kings and Pharaohs, to accomplish His plans. It is evidence of His sovereignty (See Dan. 4:17)."
2. Worldly men – "men of the world, which have their portion in this life". May God deliver us from the influence of worldly people whose focus is on the here and now rather than eternity!
 - a. Their portion is in this life, not the next.
 - b. Their focus is on amassing earthly treasures.
 - c. They leave their wealth to their children.
 - d. Ultimately these blessings come from a Sovereign God but they fail to acknowledge or thank Him for them.

V. LORD, TRANSFORM ME (VS. 15)

In contrast to the men of the world (Vs. 14), David's focus was upon being transformed into the likeness of his God. The verse has a twofold application to:

A. Present Transformation (sanctification)

B. Future Transformation (glorification)

1. In contrast to the men of the world, David was looking for something far better. To behold God's face and to be transformed into His image would be glory indeed!
2. The reference is to the awakening of the body, not the soul. It is the body that dies at death (James 2:26). We will behold God's face in righteousness. The saints will see the face of the incarnate Son of God. Refer 1 John 3:1-2.

Conclusion:

1. Christological lessons – how the Psalm speaks of Christ.
 - Only Christ can fulfill the words of verse 3 in their fullness. He is the truly sinless one.
 - Christ lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father.
2. Practical lessons – what we can learn for the Christian life.

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- To be a man or woman after God's own heart, we need to be a people of prayer like David.
- Believers will suffer persecutions and afflictions in this life. The throne of grace is available for us where we can make our appeal to an all just God.
- It is possible to be on the right side of the spiritual battle and plead with God accordingly.
- Believers need to seek God for protection from the evil one and evil men. Prayer is a key weapon in spiritual warfare!
- Believers can look forward to the future glorification of the body at the resurrection.