

“WRAPPED IN THE CLOAK OF THEIR OWN SHAME”

I. Introduction

- A. The complaint that David expresses in this psalm focuses upon the lies that the wicked are speaking against him.
1. It is important to understand that when David accuses his opponents of lying, he is not using the term “lie” in the way many in the upper echelons of our society have come to use it.
 2. In our postmodern age, those who control the levers of cultural power assign to themselves the task of *creating* the truth.
 3. To use a famous example from George Orwell, if they say $2 + 2 = 5$, then anyone who insists that $2 + 2 = 4$ is lying.
 4. In the words of another writer, when today’s establishment figures accuse an opponent of lying, they do not mean that the person is “saying something contrary to the facts. ‘Lying’ instead means opposing the official narrative of the regime.” [<https://chroniclesmagazine.org/web/how-trump-turns-postmodernist-truth-against-itself/>]
- B. I mention this because I think it helps us to see the righteousness of David’s response to those who were speaking lies about him.
1. It is not that David has taken offense because these people have dared to contradict him.
 2. He is distressed because they have spoken actual falsehoods about him as the Lord’s anointed.
 3. As the Lord’s anointed, David stood as a type of Christ.
 4. This is why this psalm is cited at several points in the New Testament in reference to the falsehoods and betrayals that led to

Jesus's crucifixion. (see Mt. 27:39; Jn. 15:25; Acts 1:20)

5. Those who speak lies about the Lord's anointed bring the name of the Lord himself into disrepute.
6. For this reason, the imprecations, or curses, that David calls down upon his accusers are not a matter of personal or even national vengeance.
7. They are righteous expressions of moral indignation and the desire for God to vindicate himself and his justice.

II. Those Who Reward Evil for Good (1-5)

- A. David begins the psalm by pleading with God not to be silent in response to the entreaties he is about to make.
 1. As he does so, he addresses God as "God of my praise."
 2. In saying this, he is bringing to mind all the reasons why God is worthy of his praise.
 3. It is noteworthy that praise is mentioned again at the conclusion of the psalm, in verse 30.
 4. The psalm is bookended with references to praise.
 5. This indicates that, even though the psalm's theme is largely one of lament, David is confident that his complaint will be heard.
- B. In verses 2 through 5, David describes the trouble he is facing.
 1. His character is under attack.
 2. The speech of his enemies is wicked, deceitful, and false.
 3. And this slander has not been provoked by anything that David has done.

4. He has extended goodness and love to his accusers, but they repay him with evil and hate.
 5. The same thing happened to Jesus when he came into the world.
 6. The reason why he came into the world was to do good to fallen man.
 7. He humbled himself by being born in our likeness in order to secure our salvation.
 8. But he was despised and rejected by men.
 9. He was counted as one who was stricken and smitten by God.
- C. When we face the kind of mistreatment that David is describing in these verses, our impulse is to defend ourselves.
1. Notice that this is not how David responds.
 2. As he says in verse 4, while his enemies accuse him, he gives himself to prayer, trusting in the Lord to vindicate him.
 3. One commentator writes, "The wicked have upset the moral order by their deceptions and their exchange of evil for good and hatred for friendliness (v. 5). Will the Judge of the universe pay no attention to this situation?" [VanGemeren, 806]
 4. That is what David is expressing in this psalm.
 5. In the New Testament, we see Jesus responding to his accusers in a similar way.
 6. Instead of defending himself, he committed himself into the hands of God.
 7. And even though the false charges that were brought against him led to his death, he was vindicated in the end, as God raised him

from the dead.

8. Our God hears when the righteous cry out to him for justice.

III. The Reward of the Wicked (6-20)

A. We turn now to the imprecations that David brings against the wicked.

1. These begin in verse 6, where David asks the Lord to “Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand.”
2. In saying this, David is evoking courtroom imagery.
3. In such a setting, the person who stands at your right hand is your legal advocate, your attorney.
4. David is essentially asking God to appoint this man a lawyer who will accuse him rather than defend him.
5. This sets up a contrast with verse 30, where David says that God stands at the right hand of the needy one.
6. While those who humbly call upon God for help have him as their advocate, the wicked man has no true advocate.
7. Another way of putting this is that David is asking for evil to be punished by evil.
8. This brings to mind a line from the third volume of C.S. Lewis’s *Space Trilogy*, where one of the characters describes the fate of those who align themselves with evil.
9. As this character puts it, “In fighting those who serve devils one always has this on one’s side; their Masters hate them as much as they hate us. The moment we disable the human pawns enough to make them useless to Hell, their own Masters finish the work for us. They break their tools.” [*That Hideous Strength*, 314]

- B. Moving on to verse 7, here we are presented with the image of a guilty offender in a courtroom pleading for mercy.
1. David says to the Lord, "When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin!"
 2. In saying this, David is calling attention to the fact that to grant mercy to the guilty is to commit an injustice.
 3. Imagine how you would feel if someone had committed a heinous crime against you and was proven guilty beyond all doubt in a court of law, but the judge said that he was going to show mercy and let the person off without any punishment.
 4. That would be a travesty of justice!
 5. God is a God of perfect justice.
 6. This is why he says in his Word that he will by no means clear the guilty. (Ex. 34:7)
 7. The gospel is not about God clearing the guilty.
 8. The gospel upholds God's justice, because Jesus paid the penalty our sins deserve.
 9. God forgives believers because Jesus has made atonement for us.
 10. Thus, as the apostle Paul explains in Romans 3, God shows himself to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (v. 26)
- C. In the imprecations set forth in verses 8 through 15, David asks that his accuser's life would be marked by brevity and misery, and that this would extend to that accuser's wife, children, and posterity.
1. Such prayers may seem to be in conflict with Jesus's command to bless those who curse us.

2. But there are a couple of things that we have to keep in mind.
 3. First of all, this is not David's personal prayer.
 4. He is praying as the Lord's anointed, as a type of Christ.
 5. These imprecations remind us that, while Jesus is presently subduing sinners to himself in grace, this will not continue forever.
 6. At God's appointed time, Jesus will return to execute judgment upon the wicked.
- D. Another thing we have to remember is that David's imprecations assume that the wicked will persist in their current pattern.
1. If a person repents of treating the Lord and his people with contempt, then the Lord will relent from sending judgment upon that person.
 2. But as long as a person persists in setting himself against Christ and his church, he is an impediment whose removal will be beneficial for the advance of God's kingdom.
 3. Listen to these thoughts from Martin Luther: "We should pray that our enemies be converted and become our friends, and if not, that their doing and designing be bound to fail and have no success and that their persons perish rather than the Gospel and the kingdom of Christ. Thus the saintly martyr Anastasia, a wealthy, noble Roman matron, prayed against her husband, an idolatrous and terrible ravager of Christians, who had flung her into a horrible prison, in which she had to stay and die. There she lay and wrote to the saintly Chrysogonus diligently to pray for her husband that, if possible, he be converted and believe; but if not, that he be unable to carry out his plans and that he soon make an end of his ravaging. Thus she prayed him to death, for he went to war and did not return home." [*War Psalms of the Prince of Peace*, 68]
 4. As for David's inclusion of his accuser's family members in the curses, this speaks to the reality that the sins committed by one

generation are often passed on to the next generation.

5. Of course, if children turn away from the sins of their parents, then they will be spared from judgment.
 6. But as long as they follow in their parents' footsteps, they are opposing the advance of God's kingdom, and we should desire that their designs be thwarted.
- E. In verses 16 through 20, David invokes the principle of retributive justice to support his imprecations.
1. His accuser has utterly failed to show kindness.
 2. He has trampled upon those who are weak.
 3. He loved to curse and took no pleasure in blessing.
 4. It is only right that curses should befall him.
 5. As David puts it, "He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones! May it be like a garment that he wraps around him, like a belt that he puts on every day!"

IV. The Hope of the Upright (21-31)

- A. We turn now to the final part of the psalm, which begins in verse 21.
1. Here David provides three grounds for his appeal for God's mercy.
 2. First, he bases his appeal on God's name, saying "deal on my behalf for your name's sake."
 3. As we noted earlier, the lies that have been spoken against David brought the name of the Lord into disrepute.
 4. David wants God's name to be vindicated.

5. This reminds us that, in any appeal that we make to God, we should have the glory of his name as our chief and highest end.
- B. Next, David points to his own great need.
1. He is poor and needy.
 2. His heart is weighed down and his body has grown weak.
 3. In calling attention to these things, David is pleading with the Lord to look upon him with pity.
 4. God does take pity upon his people when we are in misery.
 5. His heart is tender towards his children, and he hears us when we cry out in our weakness for help.
- C. Finally, David appeals to God's covenantal love for his people, saying, "Save me according to your steadfast love!"
1. David is reminding God that he has made covenant promises to his anointed, promises to which he must be faithful.
 2. Of course, it is not that God needs to be reminded of this, but this is one of the ways we stir up our faith when we are in distress.
 3. We need to lay hold of God's promises and plead them back to him.
- D. David also says, "Let them know that this is your hand; you, O LORD, have done it!"
1. In other words, David wants his enemies to see that God has ordained these troubles to come into David's life.
 2. He wants his accusers to see that God is going to work through their lies for David's ultimate good.

3. Though they continue to curse David, God will work through those curses to bestow blessing on his servant.
 4. Though the accusers seek to bring David down in dishonor, it is they who are clothed with shame.
- E. The psalm ends with David resolving to praise God in the midst of the assembly of the saints.
1. As we noted earlier, this expresses David's certainty that God will hear him.
 2. And this certainty is not a matter of mere optimism.
 3. It is rooted in the fact that David knows that God is at the right hand of his servants when they are in need, and he saves them from those who condemn their souls to death.
 4. The supreme example of this is God's vindication of Jesus after he was condemned to death on a cross.
 5. As the author of Hebrews put it, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Heb. 5:7-9)

V. Conclusion

- A. While a psalm like this can be difficult for us to understand, we should not neglect such psalms.
- B. This psalm was written for public worship.
- C. As we see in the title affixed to it, David devoted it "To the choirmaster."

- D. God wanted the people of Israel to sing this psalm in their worship of him.
- E. The benefit of singing such a psalm is that it assures us that there will be a final judgment of the wicked.
- F. Certainly, we should seek the salvation of all people, but we should also desire that all who remain unrepentant will be judged.
- G. As Charles Spurgeon explains, "To love all men with benevolence is our duty; but to love any wicked man with complacency would be a crime. To hate a man for his own sake, or for any evil done to us, would be wrong; but to hate a man because he is the foe of all goodness and the enemy of all righteousness, is nothing more nor less than an obligation. The more we love God the more indignant shall we grow with those who refuse him their affection." [cited in Waltke and Zaspel, *How to Read and Understand the Psalms*, 312-313]