

Slandered Yet Singing

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Psalm 7
Preached on: Tuesday, December 1, 2020

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

What I want to do tonight, I want to go back to a text that we studied several years ago when we were first starting to go through the Psalms and it's Psalm 7. Psalm 7. I invite you to turn there. Sometimes you just make a pastoral judgment that's informed by a lot of different factors that you couldn't begin to trace out in your mind and you say, "You know, I think tonight this would be a better text than the one that I had prepared and what I had planned for." And so here we are and we'll just trust the Lord for whatever the outcome of that may be.

We need to have realistic expectations about the Christian life. The Bible tells us that Christians will go through trials. Psalm 34:19 says many are the afflictions of the righteous, and Acts 14:22 says that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. It's very important for us to understand that so that when trials come we understand that there is a context and a perspective through which we are to view them and, you know, we see things differently when we have the right expectations set. If you go into McDonald's expecting the kind of steak dinner you would get at one of Jeff Ruby's restaurants in Cincinnati, you're going to be severely disappointed. If you go into McDonald's knowing that you're going to eat something that's basically poison to your body system, you'll have a different result and your expectations will be met, not that that has anything to do with Psalm 7, I'm just going with the metaphor that popped in my mind at the moment. So we have these realistic expectations about the Christian life. We expect that there are going to be times where things go wrong for us and that we face adversity, and that we face difficult challenges.

Well, one of those challenging trials that we will face as Christians is the whole matter of slander against our character. Charles Spurgeon said this, he said, "It is a meanness most detestable to stab a good man and his reputation. We must be ready for this trial for it will surely come upon us. If God was slandered in Eden, we shall surely be maligned in this land of sinners. Gird up your loins, ye children of the resurrection, for this fiery trial awaits you all." And a big part of the reason why I wanted to bring this particular text in Psalm 7 to you is that I know that in recent past and some of you even now, you're going through this very trial yourself and you're facing the challenge of someone slandering you, and I thought that Psalm 7 might be a good encouragement to you and a help in the midst of those things.

So let's read Psalm 7 and then we'll go through the text together tonight and trust the Lord for what he has for us. Beginning in verse 1, Psalm 7 says,

1 O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; Save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me, 2 Or he will tear my soul like a lion, Dragging me away, while there is none to deliver. 3 O LORD my God, if I have done this, If there is injustice in my hands, 4 If I have rewarded evil to my friend, Or have plundered him who without cause was my adversary, 5 Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it; And let him trample my life down to the ground And lay my glory in the dust. Selah. 6 Arise, O LORD, in Your anger; Lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries, And arouse Yourself for me; You have appointed judgment. 7 Let the assembly of the peoples encompass You, And over them return on high. 8 The LORD judges the peoples; Vindicate me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and my integrity that is in me. 9 O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds. 10 My shield is with God, Who saves the upright in heart. 11 God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day. 12 If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready. 13 He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts. 14 Behold, he travails with wickedness, And he conceives mischief and brings forth falsehood. 15 He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, And has fallen into the hole which he made. 16 His mischief will return upon his own head, And his violence will descend upon his own pate. 17 I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

You could title this text, you can certainly title tonight's message "Slandered Yet Singing." Slandered yet singing. Some of you are receiving that kind of abuse right now and I just want you to know that this message is particularly for you, for the rest of us maybe this message prepares us for a trial that is still future to us and will give us a reference point to come back to later on for encouragement and for help and for direction and guidance from God's word.

We'll start tonight by looking, first of all, at the prayer of the slandered. The prayer of the slandered, and as you go through this opening section of David's prayer, of this Psalm, you'll find three different aspects of the prayer that he makes that stands out and gives us a lot of guidance for how to respond vertically to this most serious and painful trial, whether it comes at work, whether it comes in the body of Christ, whether it comes from some other source, maybe in the neighborhood or whatever the case may be, you know, we've all if we've lived the Christian life any length of time, we've all felt this to one degree or another. I can think of past times and employment situations where bad things were said about me to my boss and, you know, and just the difficulty of coming to grips with those things, and so it's with much sympathy for you that I preach this message here tonight by way of encouragement for you.

How is it that we approach God and how should we think in perspective to God in such times as this? Well, let's look, first of all, at the prayer of the slandered, and David starts with this, he starts by declaring his trust. He declares his trust and that's what you should do also, make it your first response to that kind of trial to declare your trust in God, and from the very start David entrusts himself to God's hands no matter what the outcome of the slander might be. Look at it there in the opening two verses. He says,

1 O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; Save me from all those
who pursue me, and deliver me, 2 Or he will tear my soul like a lion,
Dragging me away, while there is none to deliver.

And if you look at verse 14, we'll jump ahead just a bit, you can see that this person that David was praying about and responding to was someone who was saying false things about him. In verse 14 he says this about his adversary, he says,

14 Behold, he travails with wickedness, And he conceives mischief and
brings forth falsehood.

David's adversary was saying false things about him in a way that jeopardized him and his position, and so David starts by praying and affirming his trust in the Lord rather than going immediately into the problem that's at stake, and there's something very instructive and this takes a great deal of spiritual self-discipline to do and to make this your first response rather than something that's, you know, your sixth or seventh option when the trial comes upon you. You and I all know, we know that there is a temptation when we are slandered to go on the counteroffensive. We see and we talk to strategic people who might be able to reverse the situation for us, or in our more carnal moments we figure out how to strike back and, you know, and how to get our own pound of flesh out of the situation. Well, David doesn't do that. David runs to God in his time of slander like we run for shelter in the rain. And so he says there in verse 1, "O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; Save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me." So this opening prayer frames the whole Psalm and the whole difficulty with an attitude of trust.

Now David is going to unfold the things on his heart, he's going to lay forth the whole situation and lay it forth honestly before God, but he starts and he frames it with an attitude of trust and that's what you and I need to do as well. He trusts God even though he realizes and recognizes that his enemy is in a position to maul him like a lion mauls its prey. Look at it there in verse 2. He says, "God, if You don't save me, he will tear my soul like a lion, Dragging me away while there is none to deliver." The danger that David was in was real and yet his response was one of trust. He turns to God in prayer and the first, the framing nature of his supplication before God is, "God, I trust You here. No matter what else, I trust You here for what's going to take place." So his trust is expressed in confidence in the Lord and also with a sense of, "I can come to You and lay this out before You."

Now I'll talk about this more at the end of the message, what I'm about to say, but one of the wonderful things about being a Christian who is being slandered is that we have a Lord, our Lord understands this. Throughout his earthly life, our Lord was slandered and the subject of false accusations. I mean, people called him Beelzebul, the king of demons, and referred to him in that manner. Well, that was totally unrighteous, that was totally wrong and the fact that the Lord endured that abuse gives us confidence that when we come to him, he will receive us sympathetically because he knows what it's like. We have more as we study this Psalm than even David had. David cries out to Yahweh and knows that God will be the covenant-keeping God to him, we have seen Christ come, Yahweh has revealed himself in human flesh and has walked through this very dark valley himself and come out safe on the other side. So when we appeal to Christ in the midst of this trial of slander, we can know that we're well-received and that he hears our prayer and he knows the best about us even if others refuse to believe it. So that's a great comfort for us. It's like a magnet that draws us to Christ. It draws us to him, to know that he is like that, that he has been there, and that he's recorded for us in his word a Psalm like that that encourages us to draw upon him and to draw near to him in the midst of it. It's a wonderful encouragement and this is how you pray when you are being slandered, you start out by declaring your trust in the Lord.

Now secondly, David goes further here and you could call this little subpoint, the main point here is the prayer of the slandered and the first subpoint was you declare your trust, secondly, a second subpoint here, subpoint B, if you want to do it that way, is to define your innocence. Define your innocence and there's a lot to say here as we look at verses 3 through 5. What we find in verses 3 through 5 is this, is that David had examined his life before he prayed for help and that is a powerful restraint against us, a powerful restraint against a wrong spirit as we pray. He says in verse 3, "O LORD my God," notice he addresses him in the same way as he did in the opening verse. "O LORD my God," verse 1, verse 3, "O LORD my God." And notice that first-person singular pronoun, the possessive pronoun, "my God. Oh, You are my God as I cry out to You. You are my King in this. You are my fortress and my refuge. Mine. I call out to You, my God." And he shows forth the integrity with which he is praying in these verses. He says,

3 O LORD my God, if I have done this [specifically], If there is injustice
in my hands, 4 If I have rewarded evil to my friend, Or have plundered
him who without cause was my adversary,

He says, "Lord, if I've done any of these things, then I'll accept the consequences of it. I invite Your discipline upon me, Lord, if these things were true about me."

5 Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it; And let him trample my
life down to the ground And lay my glory in the dust.

That's an amazing prayer and you see that he's not praying out of a sense of bitterness or revenge as he speaks here. He has honestly examined his heart. This is not the immediate reaction at the first sound of someone speaking against him, he's stepped back and he's looked at his life here.

Now David is not claiming absolute sinlessness as he prays here. You know, his Psalms are full of confessions in other places. What he's saying here is this, he is saying that, "The ground of this particular slander against me is false," and he appeals to the omniscience of God who knows all things to verify and to vindicate him in his claim that, "Lord, the ground of this slander is not true. You know this, O Lord." It reminds me of the way that Peter appealed to the Lord's omniscience in John 21. The Lord asked him three times, "Peter, do you love Me? Peter, do you love Me? Peter, do you love Me?" Asked him three times because Peter had denied him three times a short time earlier, and at the third time Peter was broken and he was convicted because he saw the parallel between his denials and the affirmations of his love. And so in humble brokenness he says, "Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You." And he appeals to the omniscience of Christ to verify what's in his heart even though his life would seem to be a direct contradiction of the love that he was now claiming. Well, in a like manner here, David is appealing to the omniscience of God and opening himself up and saying, "Lord, if any of these things are true, You can let this happen and I won't complain." And you see the integrity of it. You see something remarkable about this prayer. This prayer in Psalm 7 is not a blind demand that God take his side against his adversary. David has reflected on his own life before he began to pray. David has examined his own heart. David has looked at the situation and reflected on it and thought about it and said, "Is there anything in me that justifies these accusations that are coming my way?" And after an honest examination, so honest and so accurate that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he could appeal to God to take note of it, he can offer his life and his reputation and his position, he can offer it to the dust because he knows that he has done no wrong.

Look at it there in verse 5. He says, "If any of these things are true, God, let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it. Let him trample my life down to the ground and lay my glory in the dust. God, let him walk all over me if there's any truth to it but, Lord, You know that there is not and I know that there is not, and that's why there is integrity in my prayer for You to be my refuge in this situation because, Father, You know that there is nothing true about it." Well, that's pretty challenging, that's pretty convicting, it's almost kind of scary, isn't it, if we're honest with ourselves because the truth is that when we're slandered and even if we're slandered completely falsely and that is just absolutely no truth to it and I understand, my friends, that happens to us, it happens to you at times, I realize that and I understand it, but what makes it scary to pray this way is that if we're honest and if we saw ourselves in light of the holiness of God, even if that particular slander is not true, there's a whole lot of other things about us that are true, that are sinful, that are wrong in our lives and we need to be, we just need to approach all of these things with a great deal of humility. But in the context of this particular slander that David was facing, he can offer his life to the dust in the presence of God because he has not done anything wrong, and so we can be slandered even when there is absolutely no basis for it.

What do we see and why do I call this section of the Psalm defining your innocence? Well, beloved, it's a good thing for us to do this when slander comes our way, it's a good idea to look in the mirror before you pray to God about someone who is opposing you. You know, sometimes our critics are right. Sometimes they have rights things to say

about us, and if that's the case then we need to just humbly receive it even if it's presented in a bad spirit, we need to humbly receive it as from the Lord and let it be a measure of correction against us and to humble ourselves and receive that and repent. But that's not the case in Psalm 7 and I understand that it's often not the case when you're being slandered in your own life. What we see here in these opening five verses of Psalm 7 is this, is that when the assault is untrue you can appeal confidently to God for help and know that your prayer is going to be well-received. I love that. I love that and I realize that, you know, there are people in our congregation that have lost their jobs over things like this and they've been unjustly maligned and, you know, and some of it goes far back, some of it is more recent and, you know, the consequences of this opposition is great. You know, so there is a lot on the line. This is not the Psalm of insignificant incidental disagreements and petty forces at play. David's life and David writing as king, his whole kingdom is on the line here. And so the stakes are very high at times when this is happening and David still can trust him, David can go and find resolution for his anxiety and a refuge and a defense in the omnipotent God of the universe, the God who is King over Israel, for us the Christ who is Lord over his kingdom, we can go to him and we can be confident of his ultimate help.

Now a third aspect of this prayer of the slandered is to depend on God's righteousness. To depend on God's righteousness. The righteousness of God, the justice of God provides a moral structure to the universe that we can depend upon. Righteousness is intrinsic to God's character. He is a God who hates wickedness and loves justice. Look at the text beginning in verse 6. He says,

6 Arise, O LORD, in Your anger; Lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries, And arouse Yourself for me; You have appointed judgment. 7 Let the assembly of the peoples encompass You, And over them return on high.

David says that God sees things rightly. When we say that God is a God of justice, he sees things in accordance with his own standard and so his righteousness is the ground of David's appeal here. "God, slander is false. This slander is false. God, it is a violation of Your very character, it is a violation of Your truth. God, You are a God of truth." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." And so when falsehood is spoken against the people of God, not only is it a horizontal sin, it is a vertical violation of the holiness, the justice, the truth and righteousness of God.

So David appeals to that, "Lord, Your own character is being violated here." And so he says there in those verses, look at verse 6, "Arise. Lift up Yourself. Arouse Yourself for me." In other words, what he's saying is, "God, don't let this situation continue unchanged. God, I'm asking You to intervene and to help here. Vindicate me. Defend me against this falsehood because I cannot defend myself against it. So God, You have to help me here. I appeal to Your justice. I appeal to Your righteousness here." And what you see in this Psalm is how his knowledge of God, you see how his theology is informing the way that he prays. He obviously is assuming the sovereignty of God over it because he assumes that God can help him in the situation. He assumes the omniscience

of God because God knows the reality of the situation and what David has done with his hands and in his heart, he appeals to that. He knows the justice and the righteousness of God and so he appeals to that. This is a multifaceted appeal to the unified essence of God where David understands his perfections, the glories of his attributes, and makes God's character the ground upon which he appeals for God to come and help him. Don't ever let anybody tell you that theology doesn't matter. "I prefer Christian living, I'm not that interested in theology." That's a really wicked thing to say. It's a very ignorant thing to say because your theology and your understanding of who God is directly impacts the way that you live and the way that you pray. If God isn't sovereign, David prays completely differently. If God isn't righteous, God forbid the thought, then there is no grounds of appeal for justice. David knows God and so he prays in a particular way here.

Look at verse 8, he says,

8 The LORD judges the peoples; Vindicate me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and my integrity that is in me. 9 O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds.

So great is the righteousness of God that he will judge the nations in righteousness. It's not simply that God has the power to deal with individual situations of slander, God is able to judge entire nations, entire peoples according to the standards of his truth and righteousness. So whether it's nations, whether it's individuals, it's all equally within the power of God to effortlessly see a matter righteously and judge it appropriately, and in the midst of that great sovereign righteousness of God, David understands that he will protect David in the midst of this particular slander of which he speaks.

Look at verses 10 and 11. He says,

10 My shield is with God, Who saves the upright in heart. 11 God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day.

David knows God so well, his heart and his mind have been strengthened so much by the truth of God over time that he understands that God will protect him like a shield protects a soldier in combat. Now my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, understand what he is doing here, what he is and what he is not doing. This prayer by David is not a self-centered desire for ease and just wanting a situation to go well for him for its own sake. He's examined himself. He's appealing to the character of God. This prayer that we find in Psalm 7 is the prayer of a man of integrity resting in the righteousness of God. Let me say that again: it's the prayer of a man of integrity resting in the righteousness of God. And so that righteousness, that rest, that integrity displays itself in trust, it displays itself in a knowledge of God, it displays itself in a transparent self-examination before bringing his request to God. And so we see how he opens in this multifaceted prayer.

Now that leads us to the second primary point, the second main point of our text this evening and it's this, it's the protection of the slandered. The protection of the slandered.

We've seen how the slandered pray and how David prays in this, and now we look at the protection of the slandered and David here takes an eye horizontally toward those that are accusing him and there's a warning that's implicit in the text to the wicked that their falsehoods will not stand. In light of who God is and in light of the way that David has prayed, their slander cannot be successful in the end and why is that, and why is David making that statement? Well, beloved, understand it is not because David is taking vengeance into his own hand. It's not that David is responding and he's going to correct things by himself. His trust is in God and he explains how God in his character results in protection for him in the midst of these unjust accusations that are coming against him. And we see, first of all, as a sub point here, the first subpoint, the protection of the slandered, the first subpoint is this, is that God judges the wicked. God judges the wicked and as we, you know, as we go deeper into this Psalm, you know, I hope that you see and sense that we're on very holy ground here. These are matters of frightful consequence and we see the consequences of the holiness of God against those who violate it and what we see is this, is that the righteousness of God ultimately guarantees the doom of the wicked, of the unrepentant wicked. Their doom is sure. It's frightening.

Verse 12, look at it with me. He says,

12 If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready. 13 He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts.

These swords and this imagery of weapons are expressing the inevitability of the judgment of God. In the warfare of ancient times, arrows were dipped in oil, set on fire and then they were shot against the enemy. It was a very effective and destructive manner of warfare and David is ascribing that kind of power to God. God is a warrior for righteousness. He will fight for truth. He will fight for integrity. He will fight and defend his people and that means that he will judge the wicked who rise up against his people. He is a God of righteousness and that's a fearsome thing. You know, and for all of us it's good for us to step back and to just see the holiness of God on display in this manner and to remember something very essential about the nature of God and the response that it produces in our hearts.

Look over at the book of Proverbs 1. For the believing heart, we see a good thing here, for the unbelieving heart and the unteachable heart, we see words of warning in Scripture that are directed against these kinds of situations. Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction." Now look, my friends, when you understand what Scripture says about the character, the nature, the attributes of God, when you believe the Bible to be true, when the Spirit works that into your heart and you receive the word of God as truth and you understand something about what it reveals about the nature of God to you, there can't be anything other than a genuine response of fear, respect and reverence to who this God is. This God is holy and he judges the wicked. This God is holy and he judges sinners and every one of us is a sinner before God. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. Well, if God is holy and he judges the wicked and I'm found to be a sinner, what can that do but provoke fear in my

heart and a desire to receive his instruction, a desire to plead with him for mercy on my own sins, a desire to look to Christ by faith and to cry out, "Have mercy on me the sinner." These are the marks of a heart that fears God. By contrast, it says there in Proverbs 1:7, that fools despise any instruction. They despise wisdom. They want nothing to do with it. They're satisfied with the thoughts of their own mind and their own way forward and they reject counsel and they reject the word of God. Friends, I want to tell you if any of you are here in that desperately bad position, that doesn't turn out well for anybody. The path of the fool is the path of destruction. The path of the rejection of God as the prodigal son found out, the path of rejection of God is to end up in a pigsty someplace, metaphorically speaking, and I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

So it becomes my privilege and duty to warn people that God is a holy God, he is not mocked, and he's a God who has indignation every day, and this is what David is saying, God judges the wicked and that is an assurance of the protection that God will give to him. If wickedness is being inflicted upon us, we can take refuge in the fact that God sees, God knows and God judges wickedness, and so the present experience and the suffering of the slander is not the ultimate outcome, it could not possibly be that way. There is a reversal that is coming and David describes that reversal, we could say it this way, you know, we're talking about the protection of the slandered, well, God judges the wicked and a corollary of that is that wickedness, second subpoint here, wickedness backfires. Wickedness backfires. Like a boomerang, if I can use an Aussie figure here, like a boomerang wickedness returns to the one who commits it.

Look at verse 14, 15 and 16 which we had looked at earlier, the first verse anyway. He says,

14 Behold, he travails with wickedness, And he conceives mischief and brings forth falsehood. 15 He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, And has fallen into the hole which he made.

David is looking at this somewhat prophetically. It's so sure to happen that he can express it as a past tense event even though it hasn't taken place yet. It's so sure to occur that this wicked man has dug a pit he himself is going to fall into it. Verse 16,

16 His mischief will return upon his own head, And his violence will descend upon his own pate.

David pictures the wicked man there in verse 14 as though he were, it's like a pregnant woman giving birth. He travails with wickedness. He's so full of evil that it has to come out. The baby has to come out of the mother's womb at the end of the nine months, and the wickedness has to come out of this man, and he's so full of it that it can't be any other way but David says it's not going to succeed. A man digs a pit then falls into it to his own destruction, and the whole point here is that that which the wicked man meant to harm someone else comes back to harm him.

I was remembering, I actually had a boomerang one time when I was a kid and in the house in which I grew up in there was a somewhat narrow field immediately adjacent that I and some of the neighborhood kids would play in, did a lot of different things. And I'm not going to ask how many of you have ever thrown a boomerang but it's not easy to do, and as a little kid, you know, I just tried and tried and it just, you know, it would always just go a few feet and it would just fall down like a big heavy rock. But I kept doing it because I didn't have anything better to do with my time, I guess, and eventually I could get it to go straight and then it would fall down out there. So that was cool so I just kept doing that and doing that. Well, you know, the whole point of a boomerang is it's supposed to come back at you, and one time perhaps the last time that I threw that boomerang, it worked and I flung that thing like you throw a football, kind of how you're supposed to throw them, and I watched that thing and it was a thing of beauty and it spun around and it was, you know, it was about six, seven feet off the ground and then all of a sudden my eyes must have gotten like saucers because I saw that thing coming back at me. That thing was going to decapitate me and I had no idea that that was actually going to work. The boomerang came back to me in a way that I wasn't expecting. It was a scary sight. Well, what David is talking about here is that the wicked may not realize it at the time but their wicked acts are like that and they throw it out and nothing occurs, you know, there's no harm, there's no threat to them, they keep doing it and they keep doing it and they keep doing it, but one day in a fearsome display of the righteous order of the universe that God has established, one day in the providence of God that wickedness is going to come back on their own head with great power and there's not going to be any avoiding or escaping it, and it's a frightful picture. That's what sin is like and, beloved, that's what slander is like. Sooner or later it returns to the head of the evildoer.

I know a man who lost his job many years ago, lost his job to the lies and slanders of his boss and, you know, it took a few years before it came out and the boss was exposed as the one who was the wicked one and my friend was vindicated and restored to a position of prominence that the character of his life merited. What you and I need to see is that when slander is coming to us, you and I, we don't need to see the outcome before we trust God, it's enough for us to know who God is and what he is like and to rest in that. "God, You're a righteous God. You're a loving faithful God. You're a merciful God. You are good to Your people. You are a shield and a protection to Your people. And so I understand in the midst of this, Lord, that even though this is happening now and I don't see the outcome of it and I may be humbled more before this finds any resolution, and this may go for a long time, O God, and there may be great consequences, O God, to this slander but, God, here in the quietness before Your throne, here as I reflect on who You are and Your righteousness and Your care for me, I know that You will care for this in the end. You will protect me. You will help me. And whatever comes in the interim, O God, I trust You for that final outcome. You will vindicate me and unrepented wickedness will eventually return to the head of the evildoer." Often we see that work out in this life, certainly we'll see it work out in final judgment in the end. So the outcome of this problem is assured and as a result of that David can sing with faith as we'll see in the final verse in just a moment.

I thought it might be helpful to go on a little bit of a, take a scenic view here before we get to verse 17 and to just work out some practical implications and some practical thoughts for our personal lives and for our life in the body of Christ. There are some things that I know I need to emphasize at this point to help you, for some maybe to caution you, rebuke you a little bit maybe from God's word, because it's the nature of things in the life of the body of Christ that all kinds of relationships are taking place and as elders we see how these interactions take place and we see a lot of different things happening all at once. I want to remind you and ask you to turn back to Proverbs, Proverbs 18. This is remarkably remarkably important for us individually and as a church. When someone comes to you with a bad report or a bad word about someone else, maybe you're hearing it for the first time, maybe it's the repeated refrain of someone speaking about someone else, a family member, a spouse, whatever the case may be, you need to stop, my friends, you need to stop and pay attention to what's going on and what your position is as that's being said. Possibly the person is telling you the truth, possibly they're not whether intentionally or unintentionally, but you and I need to, we need to honor God and his word and we need to honor our relationships with one another by keeping a couple of very simple verses from Proverbs 18 in mind.

First of all, Proverbs 18:13 says, "He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him." In other words, don't be too quick to judge a situation based on one report from one person that you've heard. Not only is that bad, it's folly that you are doing by doing that. Verse 17 and, you know, in spiritual leadership and I know that we have men that aspire for spiritual leadership, I'm grateful for that, we have a lot of good men in our church, and I just want to say to you that it is especially imperative for men in spiritual leadership or who aspire to it to pay attention and to drink deeply from the well of Proverbs 18:17, "The first to plead his case seems right, Until another comes and examines him." You know, if you're only hearing one side of the story, you need to understand that you are vulnerable to misjudging the situation, and so you must, you need to honor God and to obey and in your own right you need to be careful about how you respond when you're hearing the first report and you haven't heard the other side because it may be that someone else has something to say to you that would completely reverse and change your perspective on the matter. And Scripture warns us against that and there is no excuse for us, there's no excuse for me, there's no excuse for you to judge a situation or to judge someone that you have not talked to, that you have not addressed, if you're so concerned about the situation and you haven't even talked to the other person involved in it, there's no excuse for that, of drawing conclusions without having at least the benefit of the other side of the story. This is very very critical and it's a very serious issue when that principle is violated. So when someone comes with a bad report about someone else, we need to step back and say, "You know what? That may be true but I need to at least reserve judgment here because I haven't heard the other side of the story. I don't know what the other person might say about that." That's a responsibility before God not simply a responsibility before man, and it's very easy for people to sound really convincing but unless you know the other side, you're in no position to judge it and we need to protect each other in this way.

So a lot more that I would possibly say about that, but that's more than enough. I can leave it there. Something else that I want to say by way of encouragement to kind of balance out that admonishment, you might say. Something else that I want to say here and to remind you of and to encourage some of you deeply is that sometimes this slander, some of you know from sad personal experience, sometimes the slander happens really close to home, doesn't it? It comes from people that you love. While the text is not directly about slander, Jesus gave us words of warning and preparation to know that sometimes it's going to be like that and the sorrow of it is immeasurable, but it helps us and comforts us to know that Christ speaks to this and helps us. In Matthew 10:34, I want you to turn there. Matthew 10:34. And again, you know, you just have sometimes a pastoral sense that something needs to be said to help people and that's what I'm trying to do here, not knowing where it will go out, not knowing who will find the balm for their soul on this night as a result of these words from Scripture, but Jesus told us in Matthew 10:34, he said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household." And so Jesus tells us to expect the fact that in following him in righteousness there will be times where there will be opposition under our own roof, and the pain of that is immeasurable. I understand that for those of you that are in it, it causes you to lose sleep at night, and that loss of sleep is not an indication of a failure to trust God, it's an indication of how much you love the offending party and it's just so hard to reconcile in your mind and you long for it to be different, and yet the situation just prolongs day after day. Some of you know about that, don't you?

Well, we see here in the words of Christ and I opened this with a comment, with having realistic expectations that there are afflictions and sometimes Christ tells us the afflictions will come within the walls of our own home. I don't know about you, I find that helpful and comforting. "Ah, the Lord told us to expect that. The Lord saw this coming. He told me. He prepared me in advance, so much so that He says a faithful disciple of Mine will find this to be true at times. Wow. So the conflict is not necessarily, Lord, an indication that I've done something wrong?" That's right. There are spiritual forces at work here and we should not expect a life of unbroken peace even within our own home. Wow. And he goes on to say in verse 37 and he makes promises, he makes a warning and a promise as he says these things. He says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Verse 39 but "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it." Christ tells us, says, "You've given all to follow Me," he has us protected, he has us covered, he will bless us for that. We do not believe in the Lord in vain. The one who believes in him will not be disappointed and, yes, there may be disappointments in life along the way, even seriously provoking ones, but in the end the faithfulness of Christ will prevail over it and we will find that he blesses us in the end.

So I'm grateful to those of you that have been faithful to Christ in the midst of opposition from your own household, your own family, and I just want to encourage you with this word from the Lord, that he has anticipated it and he promises to bless us in the end. In

the bigger picture, the broader picture, we take comfort in the fact that the Lord knows the way of the righteous, Psalm 1:6. The Lord knows the truth about the situations and we can rest in that. "Lord, You know. That's enough for me."

And where does that leave us? Well, go back to Psalm 7 now and we see this third and final point, the praise of the slandered. We've seen the prayer of the slandered, the protection of the slandered, now finally the praise of the slandered. Psalm 7:17. David can sing because God protects the innocent, God protects his people. Even though we are sinful in ourselves, Christ's blood cleanses us, God forgives us and he protects us, and where does that leave our heart at the end of the day in the midst of all of these things of which we've discussed? Verse 17,

17 I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

You know, it's like a kettle that's been brought to full boil. There's all of this internal action, this internal pressure that's taken place as we've contemplated the attributes of God and we see the moral order of the universe, and we place ourselves in it and we entrust ourselves to a holy God and know what he does with the wicked, and all of this that is so far beyond our ability to orchestrate, so far beyond our comprehension, we step back, we take a deep breath and we say all of the certainties of these things bring me to a point where I can give thanks to the Lord and praise him and honor him. God has a universal reign and he will move evil in the end, and David's temptations to despair are transformed into a present reality of hope. And so David though he is slandered in real time as this Psalm is being written, he sings, he rejoices.

What can we take away from all of this? Well, just a couple of closing thoughts here. The time always goes so so fast. This is the fastest hour of the week for me. Beloved, Scripture comforts us, tells us and encourages us that God's people may be harmed genuinely by the slander of men, it shows us that rather than to retaliate, we can go humbly to the Lord and find our rest in him. We can find the best outcome by trusting the Lord, we can only find peace by trusting him in the midst of it, and isn't that what our Lord did?

Go back to 1 Peter. Our Lord himself, the Lord our Lord Jesus Christ himself walked this path. The Lord himself, the righteous one who had no sins of his own, and so anything that spoke badly about him was by definition false. We find that Christ has gone before us in this. 1 Peter 2:21, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps," Christ, "who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth," look at this, the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ himself, what happened to him? Verse 23, and how did he respond, "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." There's a New Testament pattern of what we've seen in Psalm 7 and the remarkable thing for New Testament believers to be able to look back on, the remarkable thing is that as Christ did that, as he hung on the cross while men mocked him and slandered him blasphemously, is to

recognize that our very redemption arose from the crucible of such slander. Verse 24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Chapter 3, verse 18, "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God."

God knows how to turn even slander to good, and so what do we do when we're on the receiving end of it? It's simple, we remember his sovereign righteousness and we ask him help us, and while we wait for his help to come, we sing his praises.

Let's pray together.

Dear Father, I pray that You would help each one of us to trust You when we are slandered. Ah, men can speak with such forked tongues. Help us not only to trust You when we are slandered, God, we pray that You would help us so that we would not be those who slander with our tongue, that we would not repeat false reports that come to our ears, that we certainly wouldn't repeat them when we don't know the other side. God, there is so much of practical consequence to the matters of which we speak here. Lord, make us those people that are willing not only to trust You when we are slandered, help us to be those who are willing to defend those who are wrongly accused. Help us to live righteously for the sake of our Christ.

And Father, mindful that the Lord has told us to love our enemies, to bless those who hate us, to bless those who persecute us, mindful of what our Lord Himself did when he said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing," collectively, corporately, individually, Father, we, as it were, fall on our knees before You and we pray for those who slander us. Father, maybe they're not aware of what they're doing, maybe it's intentional, maybe it's all points in between for the different situations represented here, but we're mindful that our Lord told us to pray for those who persecute us and we do that just now, and while they send evil to us, Father, we ask You to return blessing to them instead and the more that they slander, Father, we pray for Your blessing, Your help for the work of Your Spirit on their heart to not only bring them to repentance but to restore them to a place of blessing that is far beyond the one that You've given to us. Even as Christ Himself, Father, looked upon those who were slandering Him at the cross, prayed for them and, Father, many of them were ultimately saved in the book of Acts and will be around the throne in glory, what a gracious God, what a God of magnificent magnanimity You are, what a benevolent God, what a good and gracious God. So rid us, Father, of all sense of vengeance. Let us humbly trust in You. Be merciful to each one and guard our steps as we move forward, that we would not be those who violate any of the principles that we've seen from Scripture tonight. We pray all these things in the name of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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