

# A Cry for Vengeance

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**Bible Verse:** Psalm 94  
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This is a Psalm that deals with the problem of wickedness, of evil in the world and specifically evil that is afflicting the people of God, and as Scripture says so often and recognizes so very plainly, that when wicked people flourish, the righteous are hurt and they are afflicted and they are weighed down underneath the weight of it all. This Psalm, Psalm 94, occurs in the midst of several theocratic Psalms celebrating the reign of God as King. Now in Psalm 94, you don't see the theme of reigning or his kingship being emphasized in the same way that it is in Psalms 93 through 100 in those other Psalms, but it fits in perfectly with this kingship theme because as King, it is God's responsibility and prerogative to execute justice for his people. In the old days, the people would look to their king for justice. Here we are seeing the people of God crying out to God for justice in the midst of oppression at the hands of the wicked.

Now what's very interesting about this, if I can just speak about it a little bit from a modern-day perspective, we all understand that this type of praying for vengeance is at a discount, it is not valued in the perspective of people and what God's word teaches; we're supposed to be tolerant of everybody and we're supposed to just have this indiscriminate love for everyone, but Scripture does not give us that picture and, beloved, here is what I want you to see is that God did not set that kind of wishy-washy perspective for his people, quite to the contrary. God himself set the expectations for his people that he would be a God of vengeance for them at the very start of their nation.

Look at Deuteronomy 32 with me, Deuteronomy 32, and remember that as Moses was preaching this message recorded in Deuteronomy to the people of Israel, they were on the brink of entering into the Promised Land; God had delivered them from Egypt, he had led them through the wilderness for 40 years, and now this new generation was set to go in and take possession of the land that God had promised to their forefathers. They were on the verge of becoming a genuine nation, a people with their own land, with their own culture, with their own laws under the person of God as their King and their Leader, and God as they are about to enter in, speaks to Moses and says this to them in Deuteronomy 32:34, he says,

34 'Is it not laid up in store with Me, Sealed up in My treasuries? 35  
'Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For  
the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening

upon them.' 36 "For the LORD will vindicate His people, And will have compassion on His servants, When He sees that their strength is gone, And there is none remaining, bond or free.

Go on to verse 41 in that same chapter. Actually, let's go to verse 39. God says,

39 'See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand. 40 Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, And say, as I live forever, 41 If I sharpen My flashing sword, And My hand takes hold on justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, And I will repay those who hate Me. 42 I will make My arrows drunk with blood, And My sword will devour flesh, With the blood of the slain and the captives, From the long-haired leaders of the enemy.' 43 "Rejoice, O nations, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And will render vengeance on His adversaries, And will atone for His land and His people."

And so the point of those lengthy passages is this, is that when Israel was formed as a nation and when they entered into the Promised Land, they carried the promise that God would be a God of vengeance for them upon their enemies, and so God is the one who set this expectation. God is the one who declared himself to be like this and while modern sensitivities resist this line of thought, God has revealed himself as – watch this – as one who brings retribution on the doers of wickedness against his people, and this is who God is, he is a Protector of his people, he is a King to his people, who watches over them and exercises his authority and his majesty to protect them and to deliver them from those who oppress them. Now with that in mind, Psalm 94, then, is a prayer of the godly aligning themselves with this revealed justice of God.

Let's go back to Psalm 94 now and see how this plays out. I just think that it's very critical and important for us to recognize that as the psalmist is praying here, this is not the psalmist praying out of a sense of sinful vengeance, rather he is appealing to God to be the God to his people that he has declared himself that he would be. So he is praying in response to divine revelation, not sinful motions of his own heart and we're going to break this Psalm into five sections this evening, and first of all, we see a prayer for vengeance. A prayer for vengeance, and as so often happens in Scripture, the biblical writer looks around and he sees wicked men, violent men, sinful men flourishing, and it seems like there is no restraint upon them, that they are free to do whatever they want and there is no sense of resistance to them. So he comes to prayer and he calls upon God to act.

Look at Psalm 94:1 where he says,

1 O LORD, God of vengeance, God of vengeance, shine forth!

The repetition, "God of vengeance, God of vengeance," is lending urgency to his prayer, and so he's asking God to exercise biblical justice against the wickedness that he sees, and as he goes on to explain this prosperity of the wicked in his day was inconsistent with what he knew to be true about God and his holiness, and so he is asking God to avenge the wrongdoing, to exercise his holiness and bring justice where injustice is flourishing, to bring holiness where sin and degradation are abounding, and as he prays this way for God to avenge the situation would be to bring justice out of it.

So he is praying a righteous prayer here. That's critical for us to see and when he says, "God of vengeance," look at the end of verse 1 there, he says, "God of vengeance, shine forth!" He's calling for God to manifest his divine presence and so his prayer here right from the very beginning is one that you and I should be able to identify with as Christianity is on the decline and even on the downgrade in our society in general and within the professing church at large, biblical Christianity is at a discount in our day and we feel a little bit of the sense of the threat and, you know, the frustration of that because we long for righteousness, one of the marks of God's people is that they hunger and thirst for righteousness, Matthew 5:6 says, and here is the psalmist saying, "God of vengeance, shine forth! Make Yourself known here," and what he is confessing is the same thing that is true for us in our day as we look at our wicked world around us. The matters of these afflictions and the sin and the violence, the perversion, and in our day the perversion and the abortion and all of these things, they are simply beyond our power to directly change. Here in Psalm 94, the matter was beyond his power and it was out of his hands. He could not fix it on his own. So reduced to a sense of dependency, reduced to a sense of weakness, reduced to a sense of inability, now he calls out to God and from that position of weakness he calls upon God to manifest his power in a way that he as a man could not do, and so in the rest of the Psalm after he invokes the presence of God with his opening prayer, the Psalm is now framed with the theme that God would judge the wicked.

Look at verse 2 and then at verse 23. In verse 2, he says,

2 Rise up, O Judge of the earth, Render recompense to the proud.

"God, come as Judge and correct this situation." Now look at the end of verse 23 here, it says, "He has brought back their wickedness upon them And will destroy them in their evil; The LORD our God will destroy them." So the theme of judgment frames the body of this Psalm in a way that is supposed to guide our interpretation of the Psalm. These Psalm writers were very conscience of the form in which they wrote. These opening and closing themes are no accidents, these were designed purposefully to emphasize the theme so that as you enter into the Psalm and as you leave the Psalm, you are understanding what the theme of his prayer has been. So in verse 2, going back there with me now as we continue to look at this prayer for vengeance, he says in verse 2, "Rise up, O Judge of the earth, Render recompense to the proud."

Now he was a man of like passions like we are. He was a man who hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He had looked on the wickedness of the world around him and it

wearied him. He was tired of this and he had looked on the situation long enough. Look at verse 3 where, again, using repetition to emphasize his point he says in verse 3,

3 How long shall the wicked, O LORD, How long shall the wicked exult?

And this isn't the first time in the Psalms where we have seen the psalmist crying out from the sense of, should we say, exasperation? This sense of delay of troubling him some much? Go back to the Psalm of David in Psalm 13 which we looked at a few years ago now. Psalm 13, you'll see this same theme of how long being emphasized as David prayed in the midst of his trouble. Verse 1, Psalm 13,

1 How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? 2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me.

How long? How long? How long? And perhaps those words come to a beleaguered heart this evening and you realize with a fresh sense of perspective from God's word that you are walking down a pathway that the saints of God had known in the past; that we walk through times of sorrow and we walk through times of prevailing wickedness, and all we can do is cry out, "God, how long are You going to allow this to go on?" And understand, I think this is just so very important for us to grasp, understand what it is that's driving this tension in his heart. It's not a selfish perspective on things, it's a man who understands something about the holiness of God, who understands that God is a God of justice, and this prolonged activity of sin and injustice and wickedness is inconsistent with what he knows to be true about the character of God, and the tension between the world around him and what he knows to be true in revealed truth is tugging at his heart and this is what comes out, "God, how long are You going to allow the wicked to exalt themselves like this?"

So he is appealing to God – watch this – he is appealing to God to be a champion for his people, to be a deliverer for his people, to be a warrior for his people, to step into the situation, exercise his sovereign will and his sovereign power to restore justice and holiness once again amongst his people. And what is it that's prompting this sad lament of his in verse 3? Well, he goes on and explains it and describes it in verse 4. Look at it with me. It says,

4 They pour forth words, they speak arrogantly; All who do wickedness vaunt themselves. 5 They crush Your people, O LORD, And afflict Your heritage. 6 They slay the widow and the stranger And murder the orphans.

There is an oppression coming in different ways. There are arrogant words which we can relate to. Their pride. Men of power were taking advantage of God's people and abusing them. God's own covenant people were the target of their wicked intentions, and the whole spirit of this section of the Psalter is that God as King is obligated to step up and defend his people. "God, You are our King and look at what our enemies are doing to us.

Therefore, You are under obligation to step up and help us based on the way that You revealed Yourself even in Deuteronomy." And these wicked men not only afflicted God's people, they were boastful against heaven itself.

Look at verse 7. The psalmist says,

7 They have said, "The LORD does not see, Nor does the God of Jacob pay heed."

And this is always the temptation, the trap, the snare for the wicked, to think that – and this is so very critical – they think that as they get away with their sin and there is no consequence for it, as they boast against heaven, as they violate God's law, as they spurn and mock and afflict his people, the longer it goes on the more that they are convinced in their own mind that there will never be any consequence for their wickedness. They delude themselves into thinking that either there is no God or if there is a God, he doesn't see, or if he sees, he doesn't care. Anyway, the whole point is this, is that they are completely misinterpreting reality because their wickedness is flourishing for a time. And if I could speak to a stadium full of gay pride people this month, this is exactly what I would tell them, "The fact that you are flourishing for a time in our culture and in the world and it seems like your influence is expanding beyond any kind of proportion to your actual numbers, understand that it is a delusion in your mind to think that you get away with this forever. That is not reality. God will vindicate his holiness." And so we call them to fear God and repent rather than to come into this sense of delusion that makes them think not only that their actions are not seen by God, but the delusion just deepens to think that God actually approves them. They think the Lord doesn't see or the God of Jacob will not pay heed to them and to their boasting against him. It's really tragic. You know, I say these things not in any kind of sense of animosity against individuals in the movement, but just to recognize that this mass deception that is going on is clearly exposed by God's word and there is a warning embedded even in Psalm 94 to tell people, "Don't fall into that delusion and think that you are safe because that's the exact opposite of what reality is."

And you see that as you go on to the second section of the Psalm as the psalmist now pivots to a warning to the wicked. A warning to the wicked. We saw first his prayer for vengeance, now he pivots and gives a warning to the wicked and what you need to see is how it is linked with his ending words in verse 7. So let's look at verse 7 again, "They have said, 'The LORD does not see, Nor does the God of Jacob pay heed.'" Now in this new section, he picks up on that and he links the new section with the old section, repeating the same words. "They say the God of Jacob does not pay heed," he says, "You

8 Pay heed, you senseless among the people; [you pay heed ] And when will you understand, stupid ones? 9 He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see? 10 He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke, Even He who teaches man knowledge?

What he is doing here is he calling upon the wicked to reconsider their pride and to reconsider their chosen path while there is still time for them to repent. He says, "You have foolishly misread the situation. You think that God is not paying attention to what you're doing, that God is indifferent to your sin and that you can just prolong this without any consequence to yourself, you think God is not paying attention. Well, let me tell you, pay attention, pay attention, you who are down this road, walking down that road," and I'm just quoting Scripture here, he says, "You are so stupid in thinking that you can get away with this." And he appeals to the nature of God as the Creator of man to show that their assumption that God is indifferent to their wickedness is entirely unfounded. They think they are safe and outside the purview of God when they are not.

Look at verse 9 as he begins to recite some rhetorical questions here and, remember, he is warning the wicked with what he says here. In verse 9 he says, "He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see?" He said, "You are a creation of God. God is the Creator of man and God gave men ears to hear and he gave them eyes to see. Don't you think that the Creator who made man like that has the very capabilities that He has imparted to man? The One who created the capacity to hear, hears what you say. The One who created the capacity to see, created the capacity of vision, He Himself sees what is happening." And with these rhetorical questions, he is warning the wicked, "Listen, God sees and God hears what's going on, and the fact that right now He is not responding in vengeance is not a sign to you that he He's not paying attention. The God who sees and the God who hears is seeing and hearing everything that I just recited in the first section of this Psalm. God does see you. He made human ears and eyes and therefore He hears what you say and sees what you do."

And beyond that, he goes on to say in verse 10, "He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke, Even He who teaches man knowledge?" He says to the wicked, "Understand that God is King over nations, God is sovereign and He rules over nations not just individuals, and therefore, he has the power" – here's his point – "the God who chastises nations, who as we see in the book of Daniel, raises up nations and casts them down by His sovereign power and prerogative, the God who does that with nations certainly has the power to deal with the sin of individual men." And his teaching here is designed to stir in them a sense of the fear of God that would lead them to repentance.

And he says it's not only a matter of your external deeds, God reads your very thoughts, verse 11. Look at it with me,

11 The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are a mere breath.

Here you are making all of your plans to oppress the people of God, here you are making all of your plans for the advance of perversion and murder within the womb, understand God sees all of that. God knows your thoughts, no matter how you might try to dress it up with euphemisms in your language, God sees the wicked plans of your heart, the bloodthirsty nature and the perverted nature of your inner man, God sees right through all of that. So don't think, the warning goes out to the wicked, don't think that God doesn't see what you're doing and God doesn't know what you're thinking. He knows the

thoughts of men and he has power over nations and God has the power to deal with wickedness in our day today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century just as readily and easily as he did when he overthrew the army of Egypt at the parting of the Red Sea. He is the same God today that he was back then and Scripture tells us to expect the exercise of his wrath in the future; that God will make his wrath known in the future as we read in the book of Revelation which is a prophetic picture of things yet to come.

So God's omniscience means that he knows even their evil thoughts, judgment looms even while they are prospering; even while they are moving forward, judgment is building like thunder clouds about to break out in a storm upon them. So the psalmist has warned them from the perspective of the omnipotence and the omniscience of God, he works and expresses theological thoughts in these ways to warn them that their chosen path of rebellion against God cannot succeed in the end and only judgment awaits them if they do not repent. As I said in another context recently, not here from this pulpit, what we need to say here and just to remind ourselves as we see God's word and we try to teach these things with clarity, it is not unloving for us to say these things. It is not unloving for us to tell sinners the truth and to warn them about the holiness of God and the judgment that comes. That is not unloving. What would be unloving would be to know these truths and to remain silent about them and to not give voice to the warning that they need to hear. That would be unloving. That would be selfish. That would be pandering to man and staying silent out of some kind of fear of man. That's not an option for us as Christians and it's not unloving for us to warn people that they need to repent and turn to Christ for salvation while there is still time, and to help them see that they are misinterpreting reality if they think they can go down this path without consequence to their own souls. So the psalmist has warned the wicked from time to time as the text demands, we try to do that here at Truth Community Church as well.

Now he goes on to a third section in this Psalm and he answers, what comes up is he answers this question: what would judgment on the wicked mean for God's people? When God judges the wicked, what does that mean for his people? So we see here in the third section, we see a promise to the righteous. A promise to the righteous, and as we saw from Deuteronomy, God's enduring promise is to protect his people in their adversity.

Look at verse 12 with me. His promise is to protect his people in their adversity. Verse 12,

12 Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O LORD, And whom You teach out of Your law; 13 That You may grant him relief from the days of adversity, Until a pit is dug for the wicked. 14 For the LORD will not abandon His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance. 15 For judgment will again be righteous, And all the upright in heart will follow it.

God here, he's saying, has a purpose for the righteous even in the rise of the wicked. Even as the wicked prosper around us, you could find echoes of this theme in Psalm 73 for example, God's purpose for the righteous when the wicked are rising is this: he manifests

his ability to protect us even in adverse circumstances. Even in the midst of hostility and as God protects us and builds his church here in New Testament times and builds his church in the midst of such adversity, it's an even greater display of his sovereign power to accomplish his will. When God builds his church, when God saves individual sinners in the midst of such worldly hostility against everything that Scripture stands for, he is displaying this reality, he is displaying the fact that his ability to save is not contingent upon the cooperation of the world, and he shows forth his power and he shows forth his ability all the more when he saves his people and when he protects them in the midst of the most hostile environment that the world could raise up against them. In the early centuries of the church, in the first three centuries of the church, you can read about this in church history and even in secular history, there was wave after wave after wave of persecution against the people of God, 10 different waves of persecution under different Roman emperors, and yet through all of that, God still built his church, the word of God took root and the church and the Gospel spread and people were saved despite that hostility, despite the efforts to burn what copies of the word of God there were at the time, and you look back at that and you see this was a display of the great sovereign power of God to build his church and to spread the Gospel through the known world under such hostile circumstances. So God is doing his work and when he does it in the midst of such hostility, he gets even more glory, and again and again we see in Scripture the fact that salvation is to the glory of God and one of the ways that he glorifies his own name is by extending his kingdom when the world is dead set against it.

So in the midst of it, we as his people as we go through such times, God chastens us, he humbles us, he shows us our weakness so that we can learn to trust him. He chastens us so that we would come back to his word and learn from his word again. Beloved, one of the things that the Lord is intending for you in your adversity is this, is that it wean you from your affection for the things of the world, wean you from your love for the approval of man, and let those things be put to death increasingly in your heart so that you would come to love Christ even more and find your sufficiency more and more in him. He takes away the other things that prop you up to let you see that you can stand on Christ alone, and that his love is sufficient for you. The love of the one who gave himself on the cross of Calvary is enough to satisfy your heart and give you joy, peace, and contentment even in the midst of a hostile environment, and when that happens, then, God is more greatly glorified in your life because everybody can be content when circumstances are to their liking, everybody can be content when they are popular, what God manifests in our lives and our adversity is that he teaches us and leads us so that we learn to be content in Christ regardless of what the surrounding circumstances may be.

So we learn those spiritual lessons. In the midst of it also, God will bring measures of relief to soften the adversity, and through all of these things, beloved, you are meant to grasp this as one of the fundamental principles of your existence, this is something that every true Christian is meant to, as it were, to as if you're digging for a treasure, you dig out this treasure and you dust it off and you clean it off and you see this brilliant diamond that you have found in the midst of the affliction, is that you find that your God never forsakes his own. He never forsakes us. Hebrews 13:5, Jesus said, "I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you." The idea, the sense of that is, "I will never ever ever

desert you nor will I ever ever forsake you." Again and again the repetition, the heightened emphasis designed to bring to our heart with power the fact that our Lord is reliable. He is trustworthy.

We can put everything that is precious to us in his hands and know that our trust will not be misplaced which reminds me of a passage in 2 Timothy and I invite you to turn to 2 Timothy here. In 2 Timothy, 2 Timothy was Paul's final letter. He was on the verge of execution and he is exhorting Timothy to be strong in grace because it's going to, the mantle, as it were, is going to fall on Timothy to continue on because Paul's departure is imminent and he says in verse 8 of 2 Timothy 1:8, he says, "do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher." All of that to set the context for verse 12, "For this reason I also suffer these things," he's suffering as he writes these great words of encouragement to Timothy, "I am suffering as I write these things, Timothy, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." "Timothy, our Lord will never ever leave or forsake me, He will never ever leave or forsake you, and therefore trust Him and persevere in the midst of the adversity knowing that in the end Christ will reward you and will save you in the final sense, and He will display for all to see that your trust in Him was not misplaced. He will vindicate your trust in Him and display His glory by the way that He delivers you."

Now beloved, that's what we're all supposed to come to and what we're all supposed to cling to. Go back to Psalm 94 here and look at verse 14 and you see how the New Testament has simply repeated themes that were already embedded in the Old Testament for the people of God. Look at verse 14 again with all of that background, "the LORD will not abandon His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance." This is the same theme of Hebrews 13:5 which we know more familiar to us. And here's what I want you to see, beloved, is this, is that the psalmist is declaring this faith without any change in his circumstances. As he says this, the wicked are still prospering and he is still under affliction, and that teaches us that that's where you and I are to go in the midst of our affliction. Rather than immediately seeing a change in our circumstances and wanting that first and foremost, rather the opportunity for sanctification and spiritual growth for us is this, is for us to declare this kind of faith in the midst of the circumstances before anything changes. "Lord, I know that You will be faithful to me. I know that You will not abandon me, You will not forsake me, because You're not that kind of God. You're a God of loyal love. You are perfectly faithful. You are always good to Your people, and while the present circumstances are adverse and a hardship to me, Lord, I'm not ashamed, I'm not afraid, I am in no danger of being disappointed because with the Apostle Paul I say this, 'I know that Christ is able to keep that which I have entrusted to Him until the final day.'" And that is true for every circumstance, for every sorrow. This is where our hearts must go again and again and again to find relief and this is how we glorify God in our

affliction. We affirm our faith like that, and not simply making a verbal display, an external display for show to the people around us, we confess this within our heart vertically to the Lord. "Lord, I truly do believe this and I truly am satisfied in Christ here," so that the believing heart comes to this place of refuge, "My God reigns because he is the King, after all." This is what this section of Psalms is teaching us again and again, "God is King," and so we say and we affirm in our hearts, "My God reigns. My soul is satisfied in Him and therefore I am at rest." We're going to see this unveiled in the life of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1 when we get to it in a few weeks, this very same thing settled in his heart, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. I am independent of my circumstances. Whether I live or die is a matter of comparative indifference to me because I know that Christ is going to be glorified and I know that he's going to keep me whether I live or whether I die." So he is independent of his circumstances and his heart is free to be at rest and to be joyful because he's content to leave his condition in the hands of his sovereign God and let God determine the outcome and whatever that outcome is, he'll be content because he knows that the Spirit of God is always working to glorify the Son of God and the people of God. This is the place of freedom for your heart.

Now he goes on in Psalm 94 and gives a fourth section of the Psalm and he gives a testimony from experience here. Point 4: a testimony from experience. We saw his prayer for vengeance in the first seven verses, we saw his warning to the wicked in verses 8 through 11, we saw the promise to the righteous in verses 12 through 15, and now he reinforces it with a word of testimony from his own experience and he starts in verse 16 by asking a rhetorical question that he intends to answer. This is a rhetorical question. It's a literary device that he's using. He's not asking for information, he's setting up an answer to say something that he wants to say.

Verse 16, he says,

16 Who will stand up for me against evildoers? Who will take his stand for me against those who do wickedness?

So he's brought the problem full-circle. To paraphrase it, he is saying, "Where will I place my faith in the midst of this adversity?" That's a great question for you to ask in the midst of your adversity. You know, and sometimes we have to preach to ourselves, sometimes we have to ask questions of ourselves, and we look ourselves, as it were, in the mirror and say, "Where will you put your faith? What will you trust in? What will you hope in?" Psalm 42, "Why are you downcast, O my soul?"

Well, here in Psalm 94, he immediately responds to his own question. Look at verse 17, he says,

17 If the LORD had not been my help, My soul would soon have dwelt in the abode of silence. 18 If I should say, "My foot has slipped," Your lovingkindness, O LORD, will hold me up. 19 When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul.

Look at what he's saying here. Beloved, this is very precious and the richness of faith that is expressed here in these three verses belongs to you as well. This is your possession if you are in Christ. This is something for you to grab hold of and to make your own, to put it in the first person of your own experience, for you now to say, "This is my refuge. This will be the testimony in my experience."

And look at what he says there, let's look at it again. "If the LORD had not been my help, My soul would soon have dwelt in the abode of silence, but He has been my help and I'm not in the abode of silence." Verse 18, "If my foot slips, God, Your lovingkindness is going to hold me up. If my external, if somehow I falter in my heart or my circumstances are adverse or if I stumble along the way, God, You are going to mercifully and with kindness and with loyal love come underneath me and hold me up and protect me so that I do not utterly fall down." This is a very mature faith speaking here, isn't it, and it's not simply his external circumstances, he speaks of his inner man as well.

Verse 19, in words that I know will be a comfort to many of you because you know this experience, you know this by experience,

19 When my anxious thoughts multiply within me [and my mind just gets carried away and I get sucked into this vortex of worry, God, what You do is], Your consolations delight my soul.

"You bring me back to the promises of Your word, You bring me back to the reality of Your character. Lord, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, You redirect my mind and bring me back to the cross of Jesus Christ and You remind me that the Son of God has loved me and given Himself up for me, and I take refuge in that, O God, and that calms the raging waters of my heart and gives me peace to remember all of the consolations, all of the love that You have given to me, all of the promises for my future, and I realize that my anxiety is unnecessary. I remember that if You feed the birds of the air, You are certainly going to care for me. If You'll clothe the flowers of the field, certainly, you'll do more for me than You'll do for grass that grows up in the morning and is burned at night. God, it could be no other way than the fact that You are going to abundantly care for me because I am Your child through faith in Christ and therefore my soul is at rest. There is an answer, O God, for the anxieties of my heart and it is the consolations that are found in Your word." And eventually, beloved, there comes a point where the more that we see this from God's word, the more that we have to, as it were, take ourselves in hand and preach to ourselves and say that this prevailing disposition of anxiety and worry in my life is unjustified. It is not right. It is not consistent with who God has revealed himself to be to me as one of his children. He did not adopt me into his family in order to cast me at the curb and leave me alone.

So what we see in all of this which is a great comfort to the people of God, God is a tender refuge for his own in his loyal love. The love of God satisfies our soul, it is enough for our soul just as it is enough for a nursing infant to be in the arms of its mother and to find the comfort and consolation that only that baby's mother can give to it; this is the comfort and the quieting effect that the care of God for his people should have on us. We

find that our cries of despair are silenced in the arms of the love of our God, and extending the metaphor a little further, finding that even the feelings of guilt over our sin find their resolution in the wounded hands of the one who holds us. "Ah, yes, You paid even for my sins. You've washed them away with Your blood. You've covered me with Your righteousness. I am perfectly safe and secure in Your presence and the love that sent Christ to the cross will certainly keep me. There is nothing that can separate me from that love. There is nothing and no one that can pluck me out of Your hand."

So what the psalmist is saying here in verses 17 through 19 is that God will sustain him outwardly and inwardly and, beloved, this is just so very important for us as the New Testament people of God as modern day Christians is this, is that the doctrine which we teach about the character of God and the nature of salvation and the indwelling Holy Spirit and all of the things that surround the fullness of everything that we believe, true doctrine is confirmed in the personal experience of the people of God. God stands with you, God stands with us even when men fail us, even when men betray us, even those closest to us. God stands with us and we rest in him. So I ask you: is your knowledge of God like that? Is it real like that? Do you trust him like that? Do you at least seek to stir your soul up with the promises of God even if it seems sometimes to be elusive, to come to that place of settled peace? Are you at least striving after that recognizing the truth of God's word and trying to apply it to your heart anyway?

Well, we come to a closing section in verse 20, fifth and final section here: a parting warning. A parting warning. In light of everything that he said in the first 19 verses, the psalmist now draws the necessary conclusions. He circles back around to the problem of wickedness, the problem of evil in the world and in verse 20 and 21 he says this,

20 Can a throne of destruction be allied with You, One which devises mischief by decree? 21 They band themselves together against the life of the righteous And condemn the innocent to death.

He's asking another rhetorical question. He is saying, "Could the wicked really really, could they really succeed in the end? Could they really triumph in the end? Could they really prevail over the purpose of God?" To ask that question is to answer it. "No, of course not. That could never be the case."

Verse 22, in contrast to the rhetorical question he comes back to reality. Verse 22,

22 But the LORD has been my stronghold, And my God the rock of my refuge.

Look at these statements, these metaphors of the place of defense, the place of protection that faith brings him into with his God. "My stronghold," and notice the first person singular, "my stronghold, my God, my refuge, the rock of my refuge." It's all first person singular. "This is mine. This is mine. This is mine. The protection of God, the refuge, the rock, my fortress, it's all mine. I'm safe. I'm secure despite what's raging on around me."

So he circles back and he declares what it means in verse 23, for the wicked against whom he has cried out at the beginning of the Psalm. Verse 23, it's so certain to occur that he can speak about it as though it were a past tense event.

23 He has brought back their wickedness upon them And will destroy them in their evil; The LORD our God will destroy them.

Again, the concluding repetition, "He will destroy them in their evil. The LORD our God will destroy them." The repetition puts an exclamation point on the end of it. This wickedness will not prevail in the end. God will destroy them. God will judge the wicked in the end. It will be perfectly just. And in this certainty, the psalmist has found safety. Commentator Derek Kidner said this, "The living God who as stronghold, rock and refuge, has proved Himself equal to anything the enemy can send."

This is who our God is and let me just close with this, something key for us to remember as we close lest we walk away with an unintended sense of self-righteousness here. It's important for us to remember that our King had to conquer wickedness in ourselves, he had to conquer our own wickedness in order to make us his own. He had to conquer our guilt. He had to conquer our sin, in fact, he had to pay for it and at the cross Christ redeemed us from our own wickedness, our own transgressions, but it is only in Christ and only because of Christ that we have this kind of refuge and protection in our God, nothing of ourselves but a gift given to us by Christ that we would have this kind of access, this kind of refuge to our great God.

So beloved, our cry against wickedness in our day is tempered with a measure of our own humility, tempered with humility, realizing that, "I once, I was formerly darkness before I became light in the Lord," speaking and echoing from the book of Ephesians, and as we do that, as we remember all of these things, as we trust God like this, as we look to him for protection in our wicked day, as we remember that, as we remember our Christ, here's the outcome: Christ alone gets all the glory.

Let's pray together.

*O God, I pray for these brothers and sisters gathered before me, those hearing or reading in subsequent media, Father, that You would be to them this stronghold, this rock of refuge of which the psalmist has spoken. Build in them, build in us this kind of resilient faith that is not overwhelmed by what we see going on around us but trusts in the fact that a righteous God will overwhelm the wickedness that we see one day in Your time and in Your way, and there will be no doubt in the end about who is God and what Your righteousness is. For now, Father, we trust in Christ, our righteousness. We trust, Father, as sinners who ourselves once deserved judgment, we trust in a mercy that we did not deserve, we trust in a righteousness that is not our own as we offer up this prayer through the name of our wonderful and righteous and loving and patient and great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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