

Psalm 5---Approaching the Lord

We can't be sure of David's circumstances when he wrote Psalm 5, but it is obvious that it was in the midst of adverse circumstances. In his adventurous life, David had no shortage of enemies. Quite often it appeared to David that his evil opponents were winning. In spite of his rich faith in the provision of God, David could not help but have some doubts. He could not help wondering why the evil sneaky conniving so-and-sos seem to be prospering. When he prayed as he did in Psalm 5, you can feel the tension between what David believes and what his circumstances seem to be indicating. On one side you have the holy God that cannot tolerate sin, and on the other side evil human beings getting their way at the expense of others. In today's lingo we call it "cooking the books", or "corking the bat", or "after hours trading". In baseball it's called taking the "juice", and who can deny the effectiveness of this clandestine cheating? How can players past their prime suddenly gain 40 pounds of muscle and set new records while everybody looks the other way? This is what David wonders as he approaches God. How can we balance or rectify the holiness of God, when our experience in real life seems to be different? We believe God loves us, and that God wants the best for us, and that justice will prevail, but at times it seems that the bad guys are getting away with it. Even worse, for us the appearances become overwhelming in their temptations to join in the cheating. Who among us has not said, "Everybody does it", or "The ends justify the means"? We can take a good lesson from David by studying his message in Psalm 5. Be assured that any injustice is temporary, and know that God is watching. In His good time, God will make it clear that He hates evil, and He will destroy the habitual liars, the bloodthirsty, and the deceitful sinners.

Teaching On Prayer

We can learn at least three things about prayer from Verses 1-3. God rewards urgency, persistence, and expectancy. Look at the three imperatives that David used. "Give ear to my words...consider my groaning...listen to the sound of my cry". This was not just some daily prayer routine that he had memorized or felt obligated to do---there is intensity here in his plea.

Notice the repetition of "in the morning". The first thing every morning David addresses the Lord in prayer. It reminds me of the parable Jesus taught in Luke 18:7 of the unjust judge. A widow without bribe money is so persistent in bothering the judge, that the unjust judge gives her justice so she will stop bothering him. The argument is from the lesser to the greater---If even unrighteous men reward persistence, how much more will the righteous God give justice to His people?

We can also see expectancy in David's prayer. He anticipates and watches for God to act. The NIV says that "I wait in expectation".

Notice the three types of prayers from David that we can no doubt relate to. David prays with "words". He expresses himself in clearly understood words that have been thought

out and come sincerely from his heart. He also prays by “groaning”. When we get emotional, sometimes all we can do is make noises expressing our emotion, but God knows how we feel and what we are trying to say. Thirdly, David asks that God give attention to his cry. God hears our words, knows our emotions, and responds to our inner feelings.

All Important Relationship

David repeatedly uses the personal pronoun “my” to express his personal relationship with the living God. David says “my King” and “my God” and “my Lord”. This type of personal relationship is unique to Judaism and Christianity. Only the God of our Bible is a personal God. Other religions have transcendent gods who are impassive. Our God hears our individual prayers and cares about us. He knows how we feel, and what we need. He loves us so much that He gave His Son for us. David’s faith is in the God who cares and loves him. Without this relationship, we could not expect God’s attention, or that He would answer our prayers. The gods of Greece, Rome, and Canaan were not morally different from humans. They acted selfishly, they lied, and manipulated. Their distinction was in power and immortality. In contrast to those fake gods of man made religions, the one true God acts only out of love, justice, and holiness. Therefore He is reliable, unchanging, and worthy of our trust. Psalm 5 is about approaching God, and our right to approach God is based on our personal relationship to God. This relationship is made possible by God’s love for us poured out in the blood of Jesus His Son. God’s unchanging love gives David confident belief that God will act to frustrate David’s evil opponents, and vindicate David in the end.

God’s View of Evil Acts, v.4-6

In Psalm 1, he considered “the way of the wicked”, in Ps.2 the rebellion of the wicked, in Ps.3 the attack of the wicked, and in Ps.4 the slander of the wicked. Now in Psalm 5, David is distinguishing himself from evil persons because he must be different if he would be heard by God. As David reviews God’s hate of sin, he progresses from general sin to specific sins as he magnifies the intensity to make his point in verses 4-6. He writes that God does not take pleasure in wickedness, then the more intense God hates all iniquity, and finally that God will destroy those who are liars. The point is that God is incompatible with evil, therefore those who appear to be on top now (by corking their bat), will not prevail.

It is not as though David thinks he is perfect, just forgiven and living in an abiding relationship with the living God. We have only to look at Psalm 32, where David wrote, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!”, or Psalm 51, “Be gracious to me, O God according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.” David was sensitive to sin, and had the conviction that God is the answer to stem the tide. In the same way, critics think that Christians think of themselves as better than other people, when actually it is just the opposite. Christians should actually be more aware of sin, more sensitive to sin, and more easily convicted.

Hesed Love of God

Usually in the Old Testament when you read the translation of the Hebrew into English of God's lovingkindness, the Hebrew word is hesed. This is the word for the loyal, faithful, forgiving love of God. The love of men is fickle, and dependent on the object of love, but God's love is merciful, sacrificial, and unconditional—dependent on nothing but His loving nature. In the N.T., the Greek word used for the love of God is agape, but here in Psalm 5:7 the word is hesed.

In v.7-8, David distinguishes himself from the wicked by saying "But as for me". David approaches God NOT on his own righteousness, but upon God's mercy and hesed love. What is David's attitude as he approaches the house of God? David comes in humility, awe, and reverence as he said, "In reverence will I bow down at thy holy temple". This kind of humility comes only from those who understand their own sinfulness which has been overcome by the mercy and grace of God.

Consider the two different approaches to God that Jesus illustrated with a parable in Luke 18:11-12. The self righteous Pharisee went to the temple and prayed to himself—yes, he acted like he was praying to God but really he was praying to himself—"God I thank you that I am not a sinner like other people because I fast, pay tithes, and keep the law." On the other hand a tax gatherer came in with his head down, beating his breast saying, "God be merciful to me, the sinner!" Jesus then concluded by saying that the tax gatherer went away justified by God and not the Pharisee, "for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

Verses 1-7 have all prepared the way for David's petition to God in v.8, "lead me in Thy righteousness". Notice that David has no righteousness of his own and is praying that by God's grace He will lead David in the righteousness of God.

The Imprecatory Prayer

One of the distinctives of the Psalms is what we call imprecatory prayer. These are prayers that curse enemies. Initially you may say that is contradictory to the Bible, but upon further review we discover why this is actually good here. First, they express appropriate righteous anger over sin; secondly they are a natural reaction of emotion against slander and treachery. They also are personal prayers of David expressing his frustration, not revenge or attacks on the people. In doing so, he was entrusting God with the task of retribution. David expressed his outrage to God and not the enemy. Don't forget how forgiving David was to both Saul and Absalom. Therefore in v.9-10, David asked God to hold them guilty, for God to let them fall, because they were rebellious to God.

Take Refuge

In contrast, David called for believers to take refuge in the Lord, and we will find shelter. David had a sense of certainty grounded on the character of God. The bottom line is, God's nature of holiness is humanity's greatest problem, but God's mercy and love is its greatest hope.

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