

God, Our Refuge

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[0 : 00] Psalm 5 today, a slightly longer psalm, and it has some fairly complex issues involved with it, and I'll try to keep it short.

Psalm 5, verses 1 to 12. Now I'll read it out loud for us. It's to the choir master for the flutes, a psalm of David.

Give ear to my words, O Lord. Consider my groaning. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God. For to you do I pray.

O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice. In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch. For you are not a God who delights in wickedness.

Evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes. You hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies.

[1 : 13] The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house.

I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you. Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness. Because of my enemies, make your way straight before me.

For there is no truth in their mouth. Their inmost self is destruction. Their throat is an open grave. They flatter with their tongue. Make them bear their guilt, O God.

Let them fall by their own counsels. Because of the abundance of their transgressions, cast them out. For they have rebelled against you.

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice. Let them ever sing for joy. And spread your protection over them. That those who love your name may exalt in you.

[2 : 19] For you bless the righteous, O Lord. You cover him with favor as with the shield. So, the world is full of suffering and injustice.

And a lot of, we see that all around us. The poor are defrauded. And made poor while the rich are sheltered.

And made richer. In this imperfect order of injustice in this world. Sometimes the innocent are unfairly punished. While the wicked roam freely. And it is in this context, the question of suffering. Of how a good God and a sovereign God, all powerful God, can allow such suffering and injustice in this world. And of course, there are satisfactory philosophical answers for this. But the philosophical answer, though it's not unimportant, is often intellectually satisfying, but not emotionally satisfying. It's not viscerally satisfying. But the Psalms, their response is a little different. They do not sanitize, sanitize the presence of real evil and suffering in this world.

[3 : 30] Instead, they help us to think and feel with God. And this Psalm, Psalm 5 in particular, tells us that we can take refuge in the Lord because of the abundance of God's steadfast love and righteousness.

We can take refuge in the Lord because of the abundance of God's steadfast love and righteousness. And in the first part, it tells us about how God's love issues in our worship.

It leads us to worship. Excuse me. It begins in verses 1 to 3. 1 to 7, really, where the psalmist prays and prepares for worship.

And he confesses that God is my king and my God. So we can tell already that this intimacy prompts him toward prayer. He's not just reaching out to our king, his people's king or his people's God, but this is God he knows.

He's my king. This is my God. And so that he utters to him not just formal prayer, but also his groaning and cries, it says in verses 1 to 3. And he's confident that he will hear God's voice.

[4 : 39] But as he approaches God in prayer, he is reminded of God's holiness. And as he reflects on God's holiness, he's reminded that the evil that surrounds him is brought into sharp belief.

And so he acknowledges in verses 4 to 6, you are not a God who delights in wickedness. Evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes. You hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful men. And these are really categorical, strong statements, right? And they get progressively more intense if you look at how the list is arranged.

So first, it says that God in no way delights in wickedness. In verse 4, but it's not only that he doesn't delight in wickedness, he can't even stand evil. He has such an aversion to evil that evil may not even dwell with him, right?

And it goes from the abstract idea of evil that it's not merely that he's displeased by evil, irked by evil, but that he opposes also evil people.

[5 : 45] It's not that, so it's verses 5 to 6, it says, God hates all evildoers. He destroys those who speak lies, and he abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful men. And this is challenging because it flies in the face of our to feel good maxim that we use a lot, which is, God hates the sin but loves the sinner.

And because that's not exactly a biblical statement, because God's wrath is not some impersonal force that's inevitable because of our sin, but rather it's a personal outpouring of God's justice. And as theologian Leon Morris writes, it is largely because wrath is so fully personal in the Old Testament that mercy becomes so fully personal. For mercy is the action of the same God who was angry, allowing his wrath to be turned away.

And so this teaches us that God not only hates sin, but he hates sinners, right? For their stubborn rebellion. And yet this fierce hatred towards sinners doesn't preclude his unyielding love for them. They exist simultaneously. And it's his love, precisely, that restrains and delays his judgment and wrath. So we have to hold those two things in tension where we don't sterilize God's wrath so that people who are sinning can live contentedly, assuming that God still loves them and that the weight and fury of God's personal wrath toward them is, they don't feel it.

[7 : 11] C.S. Lewis writes about this in his reflection on the psalm. He said, the ferocious parts of the psalms serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness, and that it is hateful to God.

And note the word for at the beginning of verse 4. It's this holiness of God that enables, his wrath toward evil doers that enables the psalmist to pray.

That's his reason for praying. He's the grounds for his prayer. Because, of course, the victim of injustice is not going to go to a court where he knows there's a judge who's corrupt and takes bribes from his enemies and his opponents.

He will take, rather, the case to a place where a judge is known for his uncompromising integrity.

And so, likewise, in this case, because the psalmist knows that God's uncompromising and resolute in his righteousness, his holiness, and his justice, that's what enables the psalmist to pray, the verses in 8 and 10.

8 to 10. But, at this point, God's righteousness alone isn't enough for the psalmist to come because, if that's the case, the psalmist also may fail and may not qualify in God's eyes.

[8 : 28] He has to make sure he has a perfectly good, right case. And that's why, I think, here, the psalm takes a surprising turn, verse 7, because he doesn't go from extolling God's righteousness and then to extolling his own merit, but rather, the basis for the psalmist's prayer is God's steadfast love, right?

So, Psalm, verse 7 says, But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you. And there's a wonderful asymmetry.

Asymmetry here. Asymmetry here because the psalmist says that because of the abundance of God's steadfast love, he can enter into God's presence and bow down at the temple in worship. And then, contrast that with verse 10, where the psalmist notes that because of the abundance of the enemy's transgressions, they are cast out because they have rebelled against God.

So, same word, abundance. So, while it's the abundance of their own transgressions that lead God's enemies to be cast out and in rebellion, it's God's, it's not the psalmist's abundant righteousness, but rather, the abundance of God's steadfast love, his grace, that he's able to enter into God's presence.

There is a symmetry here. It's not parallel. Israel. And so, and then this, this abundance of God's steadfast love ultimately is what fosters worship.

[9 : 58] So, in verse 7, the psalmist says, I will bow down toward the holy temple in the fear of you. And, so, this is how God's love promotes, leads to issues in our worship.

But then God's judgment, God's righteousness, on the other hand, leads to his judgment toward evildoers. And you see this in verse 8 to 10. It says, Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies.

Make your way straight before me. So, this is psalmist's prayer. He prays that God will protect him and to make his way straight. And because his way, his righteousness is threatened by his enemies.

And that's why verse 9 again begins with the verse 4. For, there is no truth in their mouth. Their inmost self is destruction. Their throat is an open grave. They flatter with their tongue. And it's noteworthy that the entirety of this list of sins is, has something to do with speech.

As James 3, 6 confirms, the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. And these evildoers, their sin primarily has to do with their speech. So much so, there's no truth in their mouth.

[11 : 09] Their throat is like an open grave from which the stench of death just oozes out. And to this, the psalmist responds by praying in verse 10.

Make them bear their guilt, O God. Let them fall by their own counsels. Because of the abundance of their transgressions, cast them out, for they have rebelled against you.

And I think if we're honest with ourselves, this kind of prayer makes us a little uncomfortable. Because it seems to fly in the face of Jesus' teaching to love our enemies, pray for those who persecute you.

And so, we might ask, do these psalms actually apply to us? Do they teach a sub-Christian ethic, a Jewish ethic, an Old Testament ethic that's passed away? And I don't think so.

And the reason is that first, we have to note that the psalmist is not seeking personal vengeance. He's not seeking the exact personal vengeance, but he's calling, even though he does call these evildoers my enemies, in verse 8, it's clear from verse 10, the context there, that they're his enemies because ultimately they're God's enemies.

[12 : 17] Because he says that they rebelled against God. So the psalmist here is not motivated by a personal vendetta, but he's consumed by his zeal for God's glory. Especially since this is a psalm of David, and David's a king, and that prefigures the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And he, so an offense against the king, God's anointed king, and his kingdom, Israel, is at this stage of God's revelation a direct offense against God and his kingdom, rebelling against him.

Excuse me. And then secondly, we have to note that the psalmist is praying to God that God will enforce his holiness and justice, and he's not taking things in his own hands to enforce his own justice.

He's praying that God will do this, and he's in doing so entrusting himself to God's justice and holiness and care. And then finally, I think a prayer for God's justice and love for our enemies are not mutually exclusive.

Because, yes, we should love our enemies, yes, we should pray for them and be reconciled to them if at all possible, and we should do good to them even as they do evil to us. But when injustice cannot be righted, and when people suffer, when there's injustice in this world, it is morally imperative for us to pray for God's justice, not for our sake, but for the sake of God's glory.

[13 : 47] And I think perhaps we're uncomfortable with this kind of prayers because a lot of Christians have become functional deists that believe that after Jesus' first coming, that God basically lets the world run on its own, doesn't really interfere in its affairs, and then not until the second coming of Jesus when God finally judges the whole world.

And that's not the way it is. Because God's not an uninterested spectator. Rather, He's active and continually works in history and in our society. And we would be callous and indifferent to the suffering and injustice and evil in this world if we simply, we do not pray, cry out to God for His justice to overtake evildoers.

So there's a place for that. There's an appropriate place for that. And so then, God's love issues in our worship and His dry striciness issues in His judgment of God's enemies.

And it is for this reason, because of both God's love and righteousness, that we can take refuge in the Lord. So verses 11 to 12, they say, But let all who take refuge in you rejoice.

Let them ever sing for joy and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exalt in you. For you bless the righteous, O Lord. You cover him with favor as with a shield.

[15 : 07] It's a wonderful image, right, the continual image of the spreading of this protection over us. and then that, and then the word covering us as with a shield.

It's God's over us, protecting us, hovering over us like a bird that protects its chicks. And that's the, and this is the, and the reason why God can do that, and this is, this song and the list of sins here of, it is included in Romans 3, 10 to 13, where Paul says, None is righteous, no not one.

No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. And then he says, Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. So this is a quotation from the psalm.

And then, of course, later he says in the same chapter, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

And so this points to that ultimate reality that we, all evildoers, all of us, in fact, have fallen into this category of people whose mouths are open graves who deceive.

[16 : 21] And yet, God's able to spare us, able to show us, cover us, with favor, as with the shield because Christ died for us. Ultimately, he was propitiation for our sins and he averted the wrath of God.

And that works in two ways. It's that, first, we can take refuge in God without fearing his wrath toward us for our sins. And then secondly, we can take refuge in God in the midst of the evil and injustice of this world because we know that because God judged sin in Christ, the same way he will ultimately execute his final judgment on all evil and suffering in this world.

And that becomes, that constitutes the nature of our hope and the nature of our posture toward the world and toward God. And so I hope this encourages all of you, all of us, to let us, to take refuge in the Lord because of both his love and his righteousness.

With that, let's pray to God. and first let's sing a song to you.