

Refuge and Strength

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[0 : 01] We are in Psalm 28 this evening. Let me read that for us. To you, O Lord, I call my rock.

Be not deaf to me, lest if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hand towards your most holy sanctuary.

Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors while evil is in their hearts. Give to them according to the work and according to the evil of their deeds.

Give to them according to the work of their hands. Render them their due reward because they do not regard the works of the Lord or the works of His hands.

He will tear them down and build them up no more. Bless me, the Lord, for He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield.

[1 : 03] In Him my heart trusts, and I am helped, my heart to exhaust. And with my song, I give thanks to Him. The Lord is the strength of His people. He is the saving refuge of His anointed.

O Savior people, and bless your heritage. Be their shepherd, and carry them forever. As we come to the psalm, we will work through three different aspects of the psalm.

Those three things that we're going to come and look at today is when you are feeling helpless, where do you seek help? The second question that we will look at today is, can you pray judgment on evil?

And then the third thing is, will you praise God? So we begin with this idea of when we feel helpless, where do you seek help?

So when you are feeling helpless, where do you seek help? I'm going to read verses 1 and 2 for us again, so you can follow along again. Verses 1 and 2. And as I'm reading, do keep this idea of where do we seek help when feeling helpless in mind.

[2 : 14] To you, O Lord, I call, my rock. Be not deaf to me, lest if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.

Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary. So when we are feeling helpless, and we go to seek help, we really have two choices.

Our choices fall into one of two categories. The first category is what I would just call the not God option.

So when we're feeling helpless, we seek something other than God, the not God option. There's no need to elaborate on that. We all have a good idea of what the not God option is.

We have some examples that probably came to mind, perhaps from some moment in your life, even recently, when you were feeling helpless and you chose the not God option.

[3 : 15] We also have then our second choice, which is the God option. And I think one of the challenges that comes for us when we seek God, when we are feeling helpless, is that when we, like the psalmist, we come to God, and God can seem, as verse one says, deaf and silent.

Have you ever sought God? And maybe you didn't quite use these words, but you had this feeling. Or maybe you used these words. You're like, God, you're deaf.

You're not hearing me. God, why are you so silent? Why are you not responding to me? You know I'm here. Why are you not, why are you not even acknowledging me? The reality is, is that God hears us, even when it seems otherwise.

And when God seems to not hear us, we must persist. We must continue to petition the Lord.

We must continue to come to God in prayer and say, God, here I am. It seems like you're not

hearing me. It seems like you're not responding to me. Maybe it even seems like God doesn't care.

But God, here I am.

[4 : 27] So why does God remain silent? There's no single answer. And I think part of it is, it's just God being God. And I'm sure there is a reason.

We may not ever understand it. But when we come to those moments, when God seems silent to us, I think we have a great example here from the psalmist.

And that's that we pray about it. I think one of the great challenges that we face is that when God seems very far away, we stop pursuing God. And God can be a little harder to pursue when God seems so far away.

When God seems silent. It seems uninterested and unconcerned. And we know it's not the case. Right? We know God loves us. So we must persist. And as the psalmist did, let us pray about it. Let us acknowledge it for God. Second thing I want us to look at is this question. Can you pray judgment on evil? Let me read verses 3 through 5 for us.

[5 : 31] And as I read, you can have that question in your mind. Can you, can I, can we pray judgment on evil? Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil, who speak peace with their thoughts while evil is in their hearts.

Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds. Give to them according to the works of their hands. Render them their due reward. Because they do not regard the works of the Lord or the works of His hands.

He will tear them down and build them up no more. So I have a question for you. How often have you heard people praying prayers of judgment?

How often have you been to a gathering and there were prayers of judgment on evil? God judged them. They are doing wrong.

How often have you been to a community group? And at the end, when you gather for prayer, someone says, well, I'd like prayer this evening for judgment on the evil that's around us.

[6 : 36] I have to tell you, I cannot recollect such a time ever happening. And I feel like I would remember that because it would be so unusual to gather together to pray and someone saying, let's pray judgment this evening.

I mean, why do we avoid these prayers? That would be the question. There's certainly here in the scripture and it's certainly here in this psalm. A very clear prayer for judgment. I want you to see, I want to read this for you again, verse four.

And see how clear he is praying judgment upon these people. Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds. Give to them according to the work of their hands.

Render them their due reward. The psalmist is saying, God, they are evil. Give to them the appropriate spots to evil.

So why are we hesitant to pray these prayers of judgment? As I was thinking of this, I thought of a couple of reasons.

[7 : 41] One, I would call the boomerang effect. The boomerang effect is the idea that we're going to pray this prayer and we're going to send it out. And kind of like the boomerang that comes back around to the person who threw it, the judgment that we prayed out there is coming right back home.

And it's coming right towards us. Because when we look out, we see our own failings. Perhaps we are engaged in a similar evil. And we are hesitant to pray judgment upon these people, feeling as if that prayer will simply come around back to the person who prayed it.

I think one of the other things that we struggle with with this prayers of judgment is something that I would call the Noah's Ark effect. And I was thinking of this as I was looking at our scripture passage for this Sunday, which is on Noah and the building of the ark and the saving of Noah and his family from this judging flood that takes place.

And I've wondered with Noah's Ark before, and perhaps you've wondered as well. And it's probably, since I have children, and when you have young children and you go to buy them things, you buy them Noah's Ark things.

Right? You buy them the little bedspread that's got Noah and the ark. And I have that little image in my mind of that cute little ark with the giraffe's head poking out of the top, and everyone's happy, and they're all delightful, and we give our children the toys, go play with the Noah and his ark.

[9 : 19] And we think there, as we look at that, we see the rescue of God, and we celebrate the rescue of God, and rightly so. And rightly so do we celebrate the rescue of God. But we sometimes

forget all about the judgment of that story.

Right? Who's going to buy their kid the Noah's Ark set that's got the thousands of corpses? But that's very much the reality of that story. So we come and we embrace the rescue of God, but we forget about the judgment that comes with it.

And the Noah's Ark is a great example, I think, of how we see that culturally, and perhaps how you, you yourself have experienced that very well-known story from the Bible.

So when we come and we struggle with the reason for God's judgment, we want to embrace the rescue. We like the rescue. We don't like the judgment that comes before the rescue. And we're just uneasy with that.

And even as you think of that story of Noah and that great deliverance, perhaps even now you're still a little bit uneasy with the judgment that comes before that. So I have a final question for you, Signe.

[10:29] Is will you praise God? Specifically in this psalm, will you praise God despite feeling unheard? Will you praise God then? Will you pray prayers of judgment?

And then praise God. So will you praise God even with the prayers of judgment? Let us read verses 6 through 9. Bless be the Lord for he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.

The Lord is my strength and my shield. In him my heart trusts and I am helped. My heart exalts and with my song I give thanks to him.

The Lord is the strength of his people and he is the saving refuge of his anointed. O save your people and bless your heritage. Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

Be calm and we praise God and in praising God we do so because we trust God. That is why we are able to praise God. It's because we look to God and we say I trust you.

[11:39] And we trust God as we look and reflect upon the psalm. We trust God when we feel unheard. The psalmist here as he started he felt unheard. But here at the end of the psalm he is still praising God.

Even when feeling unheard. Even when it seems as though his God is silent. We trust that God does indeed with us. We trust that God is indeed worthy of praise.

When we trust God we can come to the idea of judgment. Perhaps we feel a bit uneasy about that idea of judgment. Perhaps we are hesitant to pray these prayers of judgment.

When we come and we say God I'm a bit uneasy with that. Or God I don't feel good. I have hesitancy because I feel like I see my own failure in this. But we come and we say God I still trust you in this.

I trust you in these moments. When we come to a challenging story of the Bible where we see God judging things. We say I don't know how that all works but I still trust you.

[12:40] I can still give you praise. So when we face these difficult moments we will continue to praise God so long as we trust him. And God does not fail us.

God does not fail us. So let us continue to give praise to God. Let me close this in prayer. God we're thankful for the example that we have here of someone who does give you praise.

God let praise come quickly to our lips. God let us be people who see your goodness and see your kindness. God let us be people who even when things perhaps feel amiss God we come and we say nevertheless I trust you and I give you praise.

We ask this in your name. Amen.