

EXPERIENCING THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE (Vol. 1 - Psalms 1-10)
Session 6 - Psalm 5: An Urgent Call to the Righteous and Merciful God for Help

Introductory Remarks:

- Psalm 5 is an individual lament, but like Psalm 4, it contains clear elements of what are sometimes called psalms of confidence (vv. 1-3, 8-12). Once again we are reminded that the laments of the righteous are not the cries of those who have no hope. These prayers are lifted up to the Sovereign King of the universe who is also the personal God who has entered into a covenant with his people. Laments are prayers of faith.
- We also don't want to miss the focus on the entire community of faith in verses 11-12. While this is technically an individual lament, the concern for the entire community is always a part of the picture. What a true believer desires for himself from God is also what is desired for his brothers and sisters in the faith.
- Like so many psalms, no exact historical situation is indicated in the heading of the psalm or in its content. Some situations in the life of David have been proposed, but the psalm remains a general cry to God for help and our only indications of what the particular nature of the problem might be are found in the text itself.

Psalm 5:1-3 - An urgent appeal for God to hear and answer his prayer.

- *"Give ear to my words...consider my groaning...Give attention to the sound of my cry..."* (vv. 1-2) - As we have seen in Psalm 3 and 4, these laments are cries of faith to God for him to act in the psalmist's current situation. He is coming before God for help. As we read through the psalm, we get the feeling of someone crying out in a desperate situation who is seeking the help and protection of his righteous and merciful God. The repetition of these calls for God to act emphasizes the urgency and desperation of the psalmist as he cries out. For God to "give ear to," to "consider," and to "give attention to," his prayer would be for God to act in such a way as to bring the justice, relief, and protection that the psalmist is praying for.

We should also notice the way the prayer itself is being expressed. David asks first that God would give ear to his "words." This is as we might expect from a prayer. He is verbalizing his request to God. He also asks that God would consider his "groaning." As is often the case in highly stressful and emotional appeals to God, we are almost left speechless. These "groanings" are, as some translations have it, the virtually inaudible

sighs of someone in such distress (here we have another word from the same general word family as the words for "meditate" in Psalm 1:2 and for the people's "plotting" in Psalm 2:1 - this explains the King James Version's translation of this word as "meditations"). This sighing is then contrasted with the loud cries that are also a part of his prayer. At times the psalmist can only groan or sigh and at others he openly cries out for the relief and justice he seeks.

- *"...O Lord...my King and my God, for to you do I pray...O Lord..." (vv. 1-3)* - The psalmist appeals to his King and God for help. The confident hope that is central to these psalms of lament is based on the One to whom we pray. He is the Sovereign King over all as well as being the personal God who has entered into a relationship with those who have faith in him. For the true believer there is no one else to turn to for help. The psalmist emphasizes this truth by saying, "for to you do I pray." If we develop a truly biblical theology, we will see God in this way as well. We will see him as the psalmist does in all of his glory and beauty. Our prayers will always reflect the way we see God as Psalm 5 so vividly illustrates.
- *"...in the morning...in the morning...and watch." (v. 3)* - This psalm is frequently referred to as a morning prayer and it's not hard to see why. He declares twice that this prayer is a big part of the way he starts his day. He also emphasizes that he is going to spend the day in expectation by watching for God's answer to his prayer. How often do our prayers lead to a life of watchfulness and expectancy? Do we really see God as the type of God who cares for us and loves to give good gifts to his children? (Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:5-13)? How often do we persist in prayer day-after-day with this kind of faith and expectation (Luke 18:1-8)? The psalmist approaches God in the type of faith found in the long elaborate lament of the Book of Lamentations where the author cries out in the middle: *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, therefore I will hope in him."* (Lamentations 3:22-24)
- *"...you hear my voice...I prepare a sacrifice for you..." (v. 3)* - David is confident that God hears his prayers in the morning, but he adds another phrase concerning what he does in the morning that is not completely clear. The ESV translates it as "I prepare a sacrifice for you." The NASB translates it as "I will order my prayer to you" (NIV - "I lay my requests before you"). The problem is that the verb used here has no direct object and simply says: "I shall lay out before you." The question is what is being laid out. It could be that he is laying out his requests or prayers before God or that he is laying out his morning sacrifice before God (which would certainly be accompanied by his prayer). The

verb itself is not directly used for laying out prayers in any other place in the Bible. It is, however, used for laying down the wood on the altar in preparation for sacrifice (Leviticus 6:5; Numbers 28:4). This makes me lean toward the idea that he is speaking of his prayers as accompanying his morning sacrifices before God. If it does, it would be a powerful statement of one who "gets it" when it comes to the way to approach the sacrifices. They too were steps of faith in God and emphasizes the one who is the source of our forgiveness and everything else that allows us to be in a personal relationship with God and to know that he cares for us and answers our prayer.

Psalm 5:4-7 - Confidence that his righteous God is present with him and hears his prayer and will always acts in justice and mercy.

- *"For you are not a God who delights in wickedness..." (v. 4)* - God cannot be righteous and delight in sin. They are mutually exclusive. God hates sin! This is an essential character trait of a truly good God. We can't ever miss this truth. In fact, the psalmist makes it very clear that this is one of the cornerstones upon which his prayer is built.
- *"...evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes..." (vv. 4-5)* - The presence of God to bless is something that the psalmist is able to enjoy, but this is not true for the wicked. No evil can dwell in God's presence. As we said before, it is utterly appalling to him. As 1 John 1:5 puts it: "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." Or as the prophet Habakkuk stated, "You are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong." Statements such as these emphasize not only the holiness and righteousness of God, but also his patience and forbearance. The fact that God holds back the fullness of his anger and wrath on a daily, even moment-by-moment basis, can only be appreciated as we understand the truth of these verses. He completely hates sin and it is thoroughly reprehensible to him in all of its forms. He is righteously angry with sin and sinners and is in no way required to wait to punish sinners. That he does so is because of his amazing forbearance and mercy toward those he righteously hates because of their sinful rebellion against him and all that is truly good.
- *"...you hate all evildoers..." (v. 5)* - We have to pause here and point out that God is not just hate sin. He righteously hates those who are sinners. We have already seen that God is angry with the wicked, the ungodly in Psalms 1-4. His anger and wrath toward sin and sinners is clear in those psalms and is even clearer here in Psalm 5. In fact, this is the consistent testimony of the Scripture.

We must understand this truth if we are to truly see the good news of the gospel in all of its beauty. In Romans 5:6-8 we read: *"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one would scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die--but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* The point in those verses is related to what we see here. Christ did not die for the good or the even partially lovable. He died for those whom he righteously hates. This is the amazing aspect of his love. He chose to love us and provide a way for us to be made right with himself. It was not based on anything good or appealing in us. It was based on his love to the unlovable. We never see the fullness of God's love until we recognize that. That is why Romans 5:9 says, *"Since therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."* Sinners live under the constant threat of the wrath of God. Only his mercy and forbearance (Romans 2:4-5) keep it from being vented at any moment (by the way, this is the message in Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* - it is actually a sermon on the amazing grace and mercy of God in the gospel). Therefore, the gospel declares the same thing that we are reading here in Psalm 5, God hates sin and sinners. But God also loves sinners with this amazing kind of love.

- *"You destroy those who speak lies..." (v. 6)* - The clear pronouncement of what we have already seen in the first four psalms that God righteously judges those who persist in rebellion against him.
- *"...the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man." (v. 6)* - A vivid restatement of the fact that God hates sin and sinners. These statements about the psalmist's oppressors also give us an idea of the type of persecution he was under. His enemies in the psalm have been described as wicked, evil, boastful, bloodthirsty and deceitful. When we put this together with the statements in verses 9-10, it is evident that they are viciously attacking David and their words are a big part of that attack.
- *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." (v. 7)* - The psalmist knows that he is not able to enter into God's presence because he is somehow superior to these other "sinners." He recognizes that it is only because of the amazing grace, mercy, and love of his God that he is able to know him, worship him, and enjoy his presence. He humbly and reverently acknowledges that God is his God and is on his side only because of God's steadfast love (his covenant love). This is the key to the difference between the

calls for judgment becoming sinful vindictiveness instead of being a righteous desire for God to be honored and feared as he deserves.

Psalm 5:8-12 - Faith-filled requests for divine guidance, judgment on the wicked, and joyful deliverance and protection for the righteous.

- *"Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me."* - David's first prayer is to be lead into righteousness by his righteous God. He wants to live by the wisdom of God and make righteous decisions (as is the emphasis in Proverbs (i.e. Prov. 3:5-6; 8:32-34; 12:28, see also Psalm 23:3; 143:11). He wants God to show himself righteous in this situation "because of my enemies." His desire is for God to clear away all obstacles and make the way he should go clear and smooth.
- *For there is not truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue. (v.9)* - Clearly the hateful and vicious speech of these enemies is prominent in their attacks. But we also need to see that the tongue is frequently used in Scripture as evidence of human sinfulness. This is apparent in Romans 3:9-20 where part of the words of this psalm are strung together with other Old Testament statements to emphasize the nature of all of humanity's bondage to sin.
- *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. (v. 10)* - This is the first clear request of the psalm. It is a prayer that God would righteously judge those who are so viciously rebelling against him and his people. He is praying for what God has already declared he would do to those who continue in rebellion against him. It is clearly not just the words of someone who is vindictive, but someone who senses something of the nature of sin and how sin is a horrific rebellion against a perfect and holy God who deserves to be loved and served with every fiber of our being. We see a similar desire in a number of other psalms and this is the reason we read words like those found in Psalm 139:19-22 (And it is very interesting that those words are followed by the humble desire of Psalm 139:23-24!).

- *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 exult in you. For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor as with a shield (vv. 11-12).* - The final verses are a confident prayer for God to show his favor/blessing to his people in the present time. We have seen the fact that God's blessing is on the righteous and those who take refuge in him (Psalm 1; 2:12; 3:8; 4:3, 7-8). The psalmist knows that God's presence brings his blessing. Taking refuge in him leads to knowing and experiencing the joy of his presence and the protection that he provides for his own. What an image to think of God's favor covering us like a shield. We are fully protected and blessed. Our prayers should be confident expressions of our faith in our God and of our desire to experience as much of the favor of his presence as we can in this life.