

Psalm 17 • O Lord, attend to my cry!

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Psalm chapter 17. It begins like this. *“Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!” (ESV)*

Now, just to let you know, we don't know the exact event that was going on in David's life that precipitated this particular prayer and these particular words. But as we even read this first verse, we can tell that as David brought this to the Lord, he was convinced that he was in the right; that his cause was just.

Because he says, *“Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!”* and come listen to a just cause, hear a just cause. That's a little challenging sometimes, isn't it? Because, when two people have a conflict, it's pretty common that both of them feel like their cause is just. It's pretty common that if you were to ask each one of them, I think both of them would clearly, say, yeah, I mean, I'm in the right. Otherwise, they might not be doing what they were doing.

It is very possible for people with opposing interests to both think that their cause is right and the other is wrong. However, David was convinced that his cause was right, and if you're thinking, well, how would David know? I mean, he was a guy just like me.

Well, as we go through some of the rest of these verses, we're going to see why David was confident. Here's the point. If you and I have a squabble and I believe that I'm right, and you believe that you're right, and somebody questions us on our position, we're going to defend our position. But the reason we're likely to defend our position is because we think we're right. And based on our own assessment, we think that we're correct.

What we're going to see from the following verses is that David didn't believe that he was in the right because he thought he was in the right. In other words, David didn't trust in his own assessment of why he was in the right or why his cause was just.

Let me show you starting here in verse 2. It says, *“From your presence let my vindication come! Let your eyes behold the right!”* Now this is an interesting statement because even though David is convinced that he is in the right, notice that he calls upon God to give the final vindication. In other words, David is

appealing to the supreme court, if you will, of God's wisdom and understanding to basically say, yours is the final ruling, God, and so I'm calling upon you for the final ruling. And this alone sets David apart from most people who have a conflict and believe themselves to be right.

We rarely ever come before God and say, well Lord, you decide. Let your judgment seat be the final judgment as it relates to whether I am right or wrong.

But it doesn't just stop there, I want you to notice here, in verses 3 through 5, David reveals how it's the Lord's standards of right are the ones that he's counting on, versus the ideas or beliefs of man. Look what he says in verse 3, and we'll talk about these.

I'm going to read verses 3 through 5. *“You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. ⁴ With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. ⁵ My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped.”*

Did you hear all of that in those verses? How many times David refers to God's standard of right? Not man's, not his. He's not saying, I believe my cause is just because I think it is, based on what I think, based on my assessment. I want you to look at what he says there.

He starts by saying, *“You have tried my heart.”* And this word in the Hebrew means, to examine. He's saying, Lord, you've examined my heart, my motives, my attitudes. In other words, David didn't rely on his own personal self-examination to determine whether he was right or wrong in his situation. Instead, he let the Lord do it for him. And this is expressed elsewhere in another very popular Psalm. Let me show you on the screen. Psalm 139. Check this out. Same sort of an idea.

Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)

*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me...*

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And see if there be any grievous way in me...*

That's an invitation from, from David to the Lord saying, you come and check me out. Here's what I wonder. How many of us Christians have the guts to do that? When we're in a situation of conflict, when we're in a situation, where,

we're not really sure what's going on? How many of us are willing to invite the Lord to turn on the searchlight of His perfection to say, check me out, see if, see if I'm really right in this thing. Because, you know for sure. My thoughts, my own ideas are skewed. I like to think I'm always right. Right? I mean, it feels good to think I'm in the right. But are we willing to ask the Lord.

Now, going back here to Psalm 17, notice that David, he also says, “*you have tested me.*” Now, this is interesting. Before he says, “*You've tried my heart,*” now he says, “*you've tested me.* And it's a different word in the Hebrew, and it's used. It was a word that was used by the metal refiner, and it essentially means, to be tested by fire. You've tested me by fire.

In other words, you guys understand how metal was refined and purified. They would put it in this thing called a crucible and silver or gold, whatever. They'd heat it up to the boiling point, and all of the impurities were then burned up by the great heat, and what was left was just the pure metal.

David is essentially saying here that, you've tested me by fire, meaning you've brought out the impurities of my reason already. We've already gone through this process. And then at the end of verse 3, check this out, look at the wording that he uses here.

He says, “*I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.*” Do you understand what the word, transgress means? It means to violate a known boundary. It means you know something is wrong and you violate it anyway. And his comment here is, I have purposed that my mouth is not going to violate a known boundary. Whose boundary? God's. Not his. Not another man's. God's boundary.

Do you see what David is doing here? Over and over again he's talking about a standard that is above him. Right? He's talking about God's standard of right and wrong. Do you understand why David now has the confidence to come before God and say, come and hear a cause that is just? Because he has elevated this conflict to the standard of God's Word which always goes above man's standard. Then he makes it very clear in verses 4 and 5. Look with me there.

He says, “*With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent.*” What is the Word of God's lips? Well, we just call it God's Word. What is he saying here? He's saying, with regard to the works of man or these issues between man and man, I've been guided by your Word. Not by my thoughts, not by my inclination of what I think is right, or what I think is wrong, I've been guided by your Word. Man, that is important.

And then notice in verse 5, he says, “*My steps have held fast to (what?) your paths; (your path) ... (and I) have not slipped (from it).*” And he's just being honest, so it's not his path, okay? It's not his idea of right and wrong. It's God's.

There's something that is wonderful when we use the wisdom of God's Word to check ourselves when there's a conflict and make sure that we're walking according to how we ought.

It really is a very freeing thing to say, well, as best as I'm able, I've tried to follow the Word of the Lord in this thing. And Lord, if I've missed anything, I invite you to search my heart and see if there's any wrong attitudes or wrong thoughts related to this whole thing. Alright.

Now, David goes on in verse 6 and he lays his requests before the Lord. And he says in verse 6, “*I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; ...*” And this is David's expression of faith.

Can I just suggest a question to you? What would happen if every single one of us, every time we prayed to the Lord, we included this line, that says, “*I call upon you, for you will answer me.*” You and I would probably say it differently. We would say, Lord, the reason I'm coming to you in prayer is because I believe you're going to answer me.

What if we threw that into our prayer? Before we made our requests, before we laid them out, we just said, Lord, by the way, the reason I'm coming to you is because I believe that you're going to answer me.

We don't usually say those kinds of things, do we? David did. Why don't we? Why don't we say those things in our prayer? Why don't we make declarations of faith in our prayer?

Well, we've talked about this before, we've actually asked that question and answered the question previously in our study through the Psalms. And the answer is, because we don't feel it, and we don't say what we don't feel. Because we believe feelings are the barometer and they're not. They're not a barometer of truth.

David declared by faith what he believed to be true because he believed it was true, not because he necessarily felt it. And we've seen that in past Psalms. There were things he said that really showed how desperate he was, and how discouraged, and how panicked sometimes he even was about what was going on in his life and yet he would always end these prayers with these incredible

statements of faith. Which, I can't believe that he was feeling at the moment based on what he said earlier in the Psalm. But he said it anyway. He declared it anyway because it was true.

And that's the point we've been making. My feelings do not dictate truth. Truth is truth regardless of how I feel about it. That's so important.

All right, here we go. He then begins here in verse 6, his prayer request. He says, “...*incline (or turn) your ear to me; hear my words.*”

Verse 7, “*Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.* ⁸ *Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings,* ⁹ *from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me.*”

Now, again, when you and I pray, we're probably not going to be quite this poetic. I'm certainly not poetic in my prayers at all. My prayers are very in your face, sort of, with the Lord. But what is he actually saying here?

Well, first of all, he's confessing that the enemies that are against him have the power to overpower him; to kill him in fact. But he calls upon the Lord to do 2 things: keep him and hide him.

He says, “*Keep me as the apple of your eye;*” That's an interesting phrase. But that it actually was used to describe something that was subject to injury; the apple of your eye. It was meant to mean something precious and something vulnerable.

When David says, “*Keep me as the apple of your eye,*” he's admitting his vulnerability to his enemies, and the danger, and the threat that is a very real thing going on in his life.

And then he uses another powerful figure of speech. Notice he says, “*hide me in the shadow of your wings.*” Of course, that idea comes from the way a mother bird is seen shielding her young chicks or whatever, from the elements, or possibly even predators by gathering them under her wings.

You'll remember Jesus used this figurative language when he talked about Jerusalem. It says He was looking over the city of Jerusalem. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I've longed to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, but you would not have it. (Matthew 23:37) This same picture, how I

long to throw my protection over you, so forth. David is asking for the Lord to hide him in under that protective covering.

Now verses 10, 11, and 12 simply describe the wicked. He says, “*They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly. ¹¹ They have now surrounded our steps; they set their eyes to cast us to the ground. ¹² He is like a lion eager to tear, as a young lion lurking in ambush.*”

And so here's his prayer once again. “*Arise, O LORD! Confront him, subdue him!* (He says) *Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword, ¹⁴ from men by your hand, O LORD, from men of the world whose portion is in this life.*” Or, again, we've talked about this before, the word, portion means inheritance or treasure.

He says, Lord, save me from men whose treasure is in this life. That's convicting to me when I read that because too often I find my own treasure is in this life. And the Lord convicts me of it, and, I'm told not to do that. I'm told not to have my treasure in this life where moth and rust and time, thieves can ruin it. (Matthew 6:19) I'm told to put my treasure in something else. But David is praying that the Lord would deliver him from those who are thinking only on an earthly level.

Now, the last half of verse 14, I'll just tell you ahead of time. You'll notice I stopped in the middle of that verse, because the last half of the verse is very difficult to translate. Again, the ESV renders it this way, “*You fill their womb with treasure; they are satisfied with children, ...*”

And the literal rendering of that Hebrew phrase is, “*they are satisfied at or satisfied are their sons.*” Which is a strange thing to say about one's enemies. Which is why the 1984 revision of the NIV sees the last part of verse 14 as a change of emphasis. Let me put this on the screen. Here's how the 1984 NIV rendered it.

Psalm 17:14b (NIV-1984)

You still the hungry of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children.

You still the hungry of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children.

It is mentioned here, uh, interestingly enough, as a positive statement.

Then, when the 2011 revision of the NIV came out, they changed it, they changed the rendering. Look at this now, what it says.

Psalm 17:14b (NIV-2011)

May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies; may their children gorge themselves on it, and may there be leftovers for their little ones.

May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies; may their children gorge themselves on it, and may there be leftovers for their little ones.

You can see that those two renderings are vastly different. And frankly, the new NIV, the latest revision, agrees more with the ESV and its rendering. And the reason is, because David is no doubt using an expression here that was common to his day, but it's lost its meaning. And David would do that from time to time. We do that.

We've had a gal, who's been translating my study in Genesis into German. She actually lives in Germany. She wrote me a number of months ago and said, do you mind if I translate your video with subtitles into German? And I was like, great, that's wonderful. Well, it's not uncommon for her to write me a long email with phrases that she doesn't understand because they're such Americanisms. I mean, I'm so American, which means I talk really badly.

And, I say things that other cultures just don't get. And here's a woman living in my time period. Now imagine a few thousand years gone by, and David uses many times, statements, like this that are just extremely difficult to translate.

Don't let this verse shake your confidence in Bible translations though because this is actually a very rare instance and there's nothing that is disputed in the Bible of any major doctrinal importance.

But it goes on here to say, and this is how David ends the Psalm in verse 15. He says, "*As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.*"

And this is like David saying, they can have it, they can have all the worldly treasure they want, because that's not what my heart longs for. And, "*when I awake,*" which refers to that time beyond the grave, David says, "*I shall be satisfied with your likeness.*" Meaning I will behold Your face.

Do you ever stop to think about what that's going to be like? To behold His face.

When I was first... just a few years after we started this fellowship, and you know that it's been almost 28 years. But after the first couple of years, there was a couple in our fellowship, who were attending and they'd been coming for probably about a year or so. And the woman was diagnosed with leukemia and, I was visiting her at her home and she was getting toward the end. She wasn't quite bedridden yet, but she'd gone through all the chemo and it had just taken its toll on her body. And she knew, she knew that it was just a short matter of time.

And I'll never forget the look on her face. Well, as we talked about, and we were talking pretty frankly about her imminent, physical death. And she looked at me, and she broke into this huge smile, and she said, I'm going to see Jesus. Blew me away. I was in my thirties at the time, and I wasn't thinking along those lines. But she just simply, she just glowed, and she said, I'm going to see Jesus. And I was like, yeah, you are. And isn't that amazing though?

I don't know how many times you've ever thought about that. We're going to behold Him face to face. These bodies can't do that. These bodies weren't made, weren't created to behold the glory of God. They can't do it. That's why when Moses asked to see the glory of God face to face, he was denied.

And the Lord told him, no man can see my face and live. The only thing I'll let you see there, Mo, is just the trailing edge of my glory after I pass by. And even when I pass by, I'm going to hold my hand over the cleft in the rock where you're hiding because the glory is too great for you. Your body wasn't made for this.

In fact, every time Moses came down from the mountain, it's like he'd been to a nuclear plant that was leaking. He literally glowed and the people got freaked out about it.

But our bodies weren't meant to behold this glory of the Lord. But David says, "*when I awake, I ... (will) be satisfied with your likeness.*"

What a beautiful, beautiful picture.