

A SONG FOR GOD'S DELIVERANCE FROM ENEMIES
Psalms Series Week 5
Psalm 5

July 6, 2008
Adam Wilson, Elder

I. Let us listen in on a prayer (v1-3)

II. Who is this God? (v4-6)

III. How is it that David can pray to Him? (v7-8)

IV. What prompted this urgent request? (v9-10) (Romans 3:9-26)

V. What are **we** to do about it? (v11-12)

COMPLETE MESSAGE

Psalm 5

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;
 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 exult in you.
For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
 you cover him with favor as with a shield.

I. Let us listen in on a prayer (5:1-3)

One of the great benefits of the psalms, compared to just about every other type of literature in the Bible, is that not only are they God's Word to us – after all, every part of Scripture serves in that capacity for us, as God's revelation of everything we need to know in order to live and to please Him – but the psalms, unlike say, a letter or a story, can also very powerfully serve as *our words* to God. We can turn to these ancient songs and find, in the diversity of the situations and emotions and truths contained within them, words that we can use to say back to God. Because I don't know about you, but there are certainly times in *my* life when I need the words to pray.

And really, that's what we have here in Psalm 5: a prayer. We're going to listen in on a *prayer* this morning, from David to God. And it is not going to take us very long to realize that this is probably not a prayer for the "ordinary days" of David's life. Listen again to how he begins Psalm 5:

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.

This is an urgent prayer. David begins *immediately* with a desperate plea to be heard. "Give ear to my words, O LORD! Consider my groaning! Give attention to the sound of my cry!" This is not the prayer of a man going through the motions. Something is happening in his life that's brought him to the point of urgency. Listen to me, God! Please! Right away, in the morning, I beg you, God, to hear and to act!

The psalm that we're going to look at today is really a prayer to be listened to, and if we're going to truly hear from God this morning, we will need to remember this urgency as we listen on. Don't hear this psalm as a dry recitation of ho-hum things about God which we've heard before. Hear David's groaning.

What follows in the next nine verses is going to tell us *why* David was so urgent. So join me as we listen together. We're going to hear three questions answered in this prayer: Who is this God to whom he prays?, How is it that David can pray to him?, and What prompted this urgent prayer? Then, after hearing these things, we'll hear what *we* should do in response. Three questions, and our response. The first two questions we'll cover more briefly, before spending the bulk of our time this morning on the third question, and our response.

II. Who is this God? (5:4-6)

David begins his prayer, his urgent plea, by explaining who God is. He comes before God humbly recognizing who it is that he is praying to. Verses 4-6:

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;
 the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

There are a lot of things we could say about God – the pages of Scripture are in many ways intended to do just that: reveal who God is, so that we can understand him, know him, and worship him. Yet of all the things that David could have said, he chooses to essentially say this: this God to whom he prays is **holy**.

Look at all the ways David makes this point:

He does not delight in wickedness.
Evil may not dwell with him.
The boastful shall not stand before his eyes.
He **hates** all evildoers.
He **destroys** those who speak lies.
He **abhors** the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

David is not sugarcoating the truth about this God. But this is a truth we are in great danger of losing today in contemporary American evangelicalism. Listen to how theologian David Wells describes the loss of this vision of God as holy in the evangelical church today:

The loss of the traditional vision of God as holy is now manifested everywhere in the evangelical world. It is the key to understanding why sin and grace have become such empty terms. What depth or meaning, P. T. Forsyth asked, can these terms have except in relation to the holiness of God? Divorced from the holiness of God, sin is merely self-defeating behavior or a breach in etiquette. Divorced from the holiness of God, grace is merely empty rhetoric, pious window dressing for the modern technique by which sinners work out their own salvation. Divorced from the holiness of God, our gospel becomes indistinguishable from any of a host of alternative self-help doctrines. Divorced from the holiness of God, our public morality is reduced to little more than an accumulation of trade-

offs between competing private interests. Divorced from the holiness of God, our worship becomes mere entertainment. The holiness of God is the very cornerstone of Christian faith, for it is the foundation of reality. Sin is defiance of God's holiness, the Cross is the outworking and victory of God's holiness, and faith is the recognition of God's holiness. Knowing that God is holy is therefore the key to knowing life as it truly is, knowing Christ as he truly is, knowing why he came, and knowing how life will end.

It is this God, majestic and holy in his being, this God whose love knows no bounds because his holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world. He has been replaced in many quarters by a God who is slick and slack, whose moral purposes turn out to be simply advice that we can disregard or negotiate as we see fit, whose Word is a plaything for those who wish merely to listen to themselves, whose Church is a mall in which the religious, their pockets filled with the coin of need, do their business. We seek happiness, not righteousness. We want to be fulfilled, not filled. We are interested in satisfaction, not a holy dissatisfaction with all that is wrong.

Friends, if David's language about God doesn't sit well with you, if it makes you uncomfortable – and it makes me uncomfortable – I fear that's just further proof that you and I are losing our grasp on God's awesome, frightening holiness. "God is holy" is not a nice, tame Christian idea. These things that David is saying – that God *hates* evildoers and *destroys* those who speak lies – this is what God's holiness *is*. He is not a God to be trifled with. He is not a God to presume upon. He is an absolutely holy God, and if you read through the pages of the Bible, you will see this truth expressed over... and over... and over. It's expressed in his anger, in his jealousy, in his wrath against sinners... in all those parts of the Bible that we in America today don't like to think about.

Who is this God that David prays to? He is holy.

III. How is it that David can pray to him? (5:7-8)

As David prays on, he turns his attention to himself. And it's at this point that if you know anything about David, you might wonder how it is that he can keep praying. If this Holy God hates, destroys, and abhors the wicked, then... well, didn't David do some pretty wicked things in his time? He did. So it's a question worth visiting here, briefly. How is it that David can pray to this Holy God? Verses 7-8:

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.

How is it that this man can pray to this Holy God?

Only through the abundance of *God's* steadfast love. Only by an act of mercy on the part of the Holy One, not by any number of acts of righteousness on the part of David. It's not that it doesn't matter that David has done some pretty wicked things – it does *matter* – but it doesn't affect his access to God in prayer, precisely because David's access to God in prayer doesn't have anything to do with *David* to begin with.

His approach to God's presence is one of fear – of reverent awe. He's bowing down. He recognizes that any chance he has of this Holy God answering his urgent plea rests solely on the love of God, and nothing else.

So when he asks God to lead him, it's in *God's* righteousness. He asks for *God's* way to be made straight for him.

And there in verse 8 we see a small phrase that begins to tell us what verses 9-10 are about to spell out more fully: what prompts this urgent prayer? “Lead me in your righteousness... *because of my enemies.*”

IV. What prompts this urgent prayer? (5:9-10)

Verses 9-10:

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.

If we come to these verses listening for a detailed description of David's enemies, we're going to leave unsatisfied. David doesn't say much. He doesn't provide specifics of how these people have plotted against him, or betrayed him, or opposed him. He doesn't cite which chapter of 1 or 2 Samuel he's in at the moment. He doesn't name names. That's not the point. What he tells us about his enemies isn't much, and it's more about their character than anything else. He tells us they're liars – there is no truth in their mouth – they flatter with their tongue. He compares the core of their beings to destruction and death. And then he moves on.

His plea, his urgent prayer to this Holy God, is for God to act on his behalf against these enemies. God, if you are truly such a Holy God who hates the wicked and abhors the bloodthirsty, then, David cries out, act against the wicked and bloodthirsty in my life! Make them bear their guilt, O God! Let them fall! Cast them out!

Here is another part of this prayer we might recoil at. I don't make a habit of praying this about people, and I'm guessing you don't either. But before we move squeamishly on

and just try to forget that this is in the Bible, let's dwell here a little longer. I am not going to advocate that we start making a practice of calling down God's wrath on people we don't get along with – BUT, if we are to hear from God as we listen in on David's prayer, we have to TRY to understand what it is that gives David reason to pray this.

And as we search for reasons why David's enemies deserve this – why David would call on God to cast them out – we have no specifics, no egregious examples. We have only this: **they have rebelled against you.**

David prays this because these aren't just his own personal enemies. They're God's enemies. They have abundantly transgressed against the Holy, awe-inducing, righteous Creator-God. The God who hates wickedness and cannot look on evil has been betrayed, mocked, ignored, opposed, and profaned, and David is asking this same God to respond in his holiness and his righteous judgment.

That probably doesn't make this any more comfortable for us – and that's okay. We should *never* be comfortable with the truth that God is a God of wrath who opposes sinners. That's not a truth that should put us at ease. But there's also no reason we're entitled to always be at ease. Neither is it a truth that we should ignore.

So should you pray this way? Is this a model for your own devotional life? My short answer would be that you *can*, but you should be *very careful* about doing so, and here's why.

There is a sense in which we're supposed to identify with the author of the psalms, yes. Everything I said at the beginning, about the psalms sometimes providing us with words we can say back to God, even as they also serve as God's Word to us, is true. But at least in this case, there's more to the story. See, when the Apostle Paul reflected on this psalm, he didn't identify us with David. He placed us in a different camp. He numbered *us* with the *enemies*.

Come with me on a slight detour to Romans chapter 3. Our understanding of this psalm would not be complete unless we took into account how God's Holy Spirit led Paul to understand and interpret it centuries later.

Romans chapter 3, beginning with verse 9. Hear how Paul uses Psalm 5, among other texts:

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:

None is righteous, no, not one;

no one understands;

no one seeks for God,

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good, not even one.

Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.

State College Evangelical Free Church
Message Outline

The venom of asps is under their lips.
Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.
Their feet are swift to shed blood;
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they have not known.
There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Paul uses this psalm as part of his litany of charges from the Old Testament against all of humankind. When Paul saw David's description of his enemies, he saw every single human being, every one of us, in that description. *You* have rebelled against the Holy God. All of us have guilt that goes far deeper and far beyond what we would ever, in our deluded and sinful selves, have realized. **All** of us deserve to be cast out, **all** deserve to bear our guilt before the God who abhors the bloodthirsty and hates **every** evildoer.

Before you run off to call down fire from heaven against your enemies, consider: you were born into their midst. You grew up as one of them. And if it were up to you, you would have lived and died that way, defiantly opposing this Holy God, refusing to bend the knee. And Paul says that God gave his law, not to give you a way out of that – he didn't provide rules, dos and don'ts, to show you a 12-step program to get back in his good graces – no, he gave the law to shut you up! That every mouth may be stopped, and that you and I would have no excuse, that we would be held accountable before Him.

Friend, if you sit here this morning hoping that going to church and being a good religious person is going to save you from being cast out by the Holy God, you are gravely mistaken! Or if you sit here this morning thinking that this part of the message isn't for you, Christian friend, be careful! Paul didn't write the book of Romans to nonbelievers.

Don't let yourself off the hook by assuming that this indictment is only for the person next to you.

And yet... remember that David could enter God's house, and remember why. See, if Paul's indictment on humanity is true – and it is – then if nothing had happened, if no one had interceded, you and I and every person ever born would each bear his own guilt before God. But this passage in Romans continues, from the rendering of the guilty verdict against all of humanity, to what has been called the most important paragraph ever written. And I hope you can see why:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for 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. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Did you hear the good news? Not because of anything in us, or anything that we did, but only because of Jesus, God has provided a way that we his enemies could enter his house. He has provided a way that we sinners could be justified – declared “not guilty” – by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. That all who would turn from their rebellion and put their *faith* in Jesus would be covered by this perfect sacrifice. Did you ever ask yourself why, if God wanted to forgive everyone, he wouldn't just wipe the slate clean and accept us, no matter what we'd done? Did you ever wonder why Jesus had to die? Here we see! That God would both be just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. God punished his own Son instead of you and I, if we would have faith in Him. We have already seen, abundantly so, that he is **not** a God who looks the other way or sweeps things under the rug. He punishes rebellion. But for those who trust in Christ, that punishment is on Jesus instead of on us.

Friend, if you sit here this morning counting on your own goodness to save you from God's wrath... or if you sit here banking on the popular notion of our time that God is ambivalent towards sin... you need to respond and flee to the refuge that only Jesus provides. For under his gracious sacrifice you can find peace with the God you've warred against, and you can be saved. If you are not trusting in Jesus and taking refuge in his sacrifice on your behalf, I would implore you to dwell on Psalm 5, and Romans 3, and talk to me or another Christian about what it means to flee to the salvation that only Christ can offer.

V. **So what are we to do with this? (5:11-12)**

Finally, then, let's return to Psalm 5. We have been listening to David's urgent plea to a Holy God, whom David approaches only by God's mercy, as he prays for God's justice against his enemies. So what, then, are we to do? We, who *have* experienced God's mercy, who *have* been justified by Christ's sacrifice and fled to take refuge in Him... what is our response to be to this prayer?

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.

Let all... who take refuge in you... REJOICE.

As we've been listening in on this prayer, we've heard David cover a lot of emotionally-charged ground. I hope that your heart has been able to track with these truths – to *feel*

the urgency in verses 1-3 – to feel the awe and trepidation in verses 4-6 – to feel the gratitude in verses 7-8 – and yes, to feel both the desire for justice, and the trembling humility in knowing what that justice would look like for us, if not for Jesus, in verses 9-10.

Still, to some extent, thus far we've only been eavesdropping. David's been speaking mostly about himself; it's his prayer. But now, for the first time, *we* enter the picture. For the first time David includes the *community* of the faithful – all who take refuge in God – all who love His name. And that community stretches through the ages, to include all the faithful followers of Jesus throughout history, right up through today. And includes you and I.

For us, this entire psalm has been *driving* to this conclusion. What are we to do with all of these glorious truths we've heard?

REJOICE! Let all who take refuge in you REJOICE! Do you take refuge in God? When you come face to face with your *need* for refuge from the awe-inspiring holiness of this God, do you turn to this same God as your source of protection? If you trust in His only provision – the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus – then you are taking refuge in Him, and the application of this psalm for you is refreshingly clear: REJOICE!

In fact, David says it a few different ways to drive home the point: let them *ever* sing for joy! If you are a Christian, you should be a perpetual singer for joy. Always and continually sing! Celebrate what God has done for you! David calls all those who love the name of God to *exult* in him – to be filled up with an exuberant joy in thinking about the truths of who God is, and to intentionally take great delight in Him!

REJOICE!

So as we apply this psalm together, let me ask you to do a little self-diagnosis. How are you doing at rejoicing in God? See, “rejoice” is such a common Christian word, a word we're very accustomed to in a church setting, that I fear we may make one of several mistakes when we hear that it is our application:

- First, we might minimize it. Yes, you say, I know. Of course I'm to rejoice. So you think, because this concept is already somewhere in your knowledge bank, that you must have it covered. If this is your tendency, I urge you to return to this psalm again, and again, and let it stir your heart, and check your response, intentionally. Just because you know you're supposed to rejoice, are you doing it?
- A second mistake we might be prone to is to internalize this application. Sunday mornings we may sing for joy – maybe a little more joy if we especially like the song – but we don't really “ever sing for joy.” Instead, we might just fall back during the week on “thinking happy thoughts,” if that. If this is your tendency, you may need to sing this week – and I mean that literally! I don't think when David said “let them ever sing for joy” that he meant “let them ever think songs in their heads for joy.”

Rejoicing is *not* primarily an internal exercise. It's out loud. Most of the emphasis of our personal time with the Lord may sometimes be too personal, too "inside," and not "out loud" enough. The idea of isolating ourselves with our own thoughts has a lot more in common with some eastern religions than with the biblical picture of how we relate to God. Maybe this week you need to speak and sing and put words and sounds on your rejoicing.

- A third mistake we might make in applying this is to rejoice... in our rejoicing. Follow me here. Instead of rejoicing *in God*, we rejoice *in rejoicing*. It's like enjoying a good meal not because of what the food tastes like, but because of how much we like to chew. This psalm, this prayer, is a deeply emotional expression, but it's not emotion for the sake of emotion. I fear today that many times we've so separated the ideas of "thinking" and "feeling" that our ability to do both of them biblically gets muddled. We put "thinking" over here and that's what we do when we read the Bible, or when we *study* something, or when we listen to a sermon and take diligent notes. Then over there, we put "feeling," and that's what we do when we listen to music, or sing, or have "a devotional." And never the two shall meet! We even divide ourselves into camps based on personality – some of us are "thinkers" so we go over here and put our noses in books and talk with big words and learn a lot; others of us are "feelers" so we go over there and experience God through nature and poetry. And sometimes we venture over to the other side, because of course we recognize that we're supposed to do both, but we never really see that they shouldn't be on separate sides to begin with! We're not supposed to be "emotion junkies," chasing the "highs" of the "mountaintop experiences" of connection with God, any more than we're supposed to let the truths about him puff up our knowledge base but nothing else. The *joy* that we're supposed to have as we *rejoice* is always supposed to *follow* the *truth*! David is not working himself into a frenzy just because – he's responding, and calling *us* to respond, to *truths* about who God is and what he does. In our lives, we always run the risk of either never feeling anything – being cold to the wonders revealed in God's Word – or, alternately, feeling things before we think about them. Our emotions should always be one step – and only one step – behind the truths that call them forth.

Whatever your tendency might be, God calls you, to rejoice. And specifically, he calls you to rejoice in the very truths that David has just prayed. Can you *rejoice* in God's holiness, and all the not-so-comfortable things that entails? Can you rejoice in his justice? *Do* you rejoice in the fact that the Lord covers you with *favor* – with his grace – like a shield? These truths should cause you to exult in Him... and if they don't, don't just move on... pray that the Lord would help you to be able to do that!

As Christians, we are called to be different from the world, and that difference can sometimes get reduced to merely moral choices, values, things you "do." Well, that is certainly part of it, but I think there's more. When the stress of your job, or your kids, or your activities, or your health, or your finances, begins to mount, are you just as prone to grumbling as a non-Christian? Do you find yourself just as world-weary? Just as cynical? Just as generally unhappy, pessimistic, sour? Perhaps most important of all: *Is*

*State College Evangelical Free Church
Message Outline*

the gospel, practically, just as far from your mind as it is from the mind of a non-Christian?

I'm not saying you need to put a fake smile over life's difficulties – far from it! David certainly doesn't; there's nothing fake about Psalm 5! Yet in the midst of opposition and trial and hardship, he calls his people to sing for joy – a real, genuine, vibrant emotional response to the truths of who our Holy God is, and of what he has done to allow us to enter his house. Brothers and sisters, we should not look like the world! We should exult in our God, now and forever!