

How to Face the Furies of Your Foes

Psalm 17

What will it take to satisfy you? Is it even possible to find ultimate fulfillment? If so, where would you look for it? Is there a guidebook that guarantees satisfaction? The Book of Ecclesiastes, for instance, warns you that earthly pleasures are endlessly empty. But what about those who try to worship God and do good work? Will they find ultimate enjoyment in this world? The answer is frequently “no.” Why would that be? Psalm 17 gives you answers to this important question. Evil – real, furious, violent evil – is on display in this passage. So between all this emptiness and all this evil, where is satisfaction for your soul to be found? Psalm 17 shows you how to face furious evil with prayer and perseverance in order to find ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment.

Are you ready to begin this journey? Prepare yourself. It is a rocky road, but you will find ultimate peace and wholeness.

One author commented about this passage, “This Psalm has so strongly impressed upon it the characteristics of a prayer, as it wrenches itself from the soul of a man hard pressed by deadly enemies, in a moment of greatest danger...”ⁱ

Prayer is in the very air of this psalm; it is how you continue to breathe even as you grieve.

David wrote, “**As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness**” (Psalm 17:15)

1. AS FOR ME

Let’s begin our journey with the end in mind. What is the goal? What is the finish line and what would failure look like? The goal is ultimate satisfaction. What steps did the psalmist, David, take to find this kind of fulfillment and contentment? And how did he avoid failure? David made a personal commitment; you can see this in the words, “as for me.” He described his choice, his determination, and his pledge: “**as for me.**” You are going to need to take action to find satisfaction. You will need to make a personal commitment to find ultimate contentment. This sounds like the commitment that Joshua made. In Joshua 24:15, it is recorded that he told his countrymen: “**Choose you this day whom you will serve...**” and he followed these words with his personal commitment: “**...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**”

David’s personal commitment stands in stark contrast to the conduct of the wicked people he portrayed in verses 9-14. There he described wicked oppressors; these were the deadly enemies who surrounded him (v.9). His enemies were heartless predators who spoke proudly and loved themselves and their pleasures (v.10). They surrounded the righteous and were prepared to pounce like lions from their secret places (vs. 11-12). These wicked ones were ready to strike with life-threatening violence (v.12).

If we ask, “How would you face the furies of these foes?” David gives us a tantalizing clue in verses 13-14: he prayed. David would not dwell on terror without resorting to prayer. You can see his heartfelt appeal to God with the words, “**Arise, O Lord!**” In verse 14, David’s described the wicked

by saying, “Their portion is in this life” which is another way of saying, “They live for this world.” Their treasures are the pleasures of this world, and, at death, all these things will pass into the hands of others. The wicked find no real satisfaction in life; they discover the truth of Ecclesiastes – that the flesh is never satisfied

In strong contrast to the ways of these sinners, the psalmist wrote, “AS FOR ME!” So to face the furies of your foes and find true fulfillment, you must make a personal commitment. And here it is:

2. I WILL BEHOLD YOUR FACE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

When you see the ways of the wicked in verses 9-14, it will increase your determination to choose a different way. And David chose God’s way: “**I will behold Your face in righteousness.**” David chose to focus on God. As the prophet Isaiah comforted God’s people, he put it this way: “**Behold your God!**” (Isaiah 40:9). In essence, David was saying, “Rather than focus on my foes and their wickedness, I will behold the Lord’s face in righteousness.”

How can this be?

Now that immediately raises a question. If we want to take action, and find ultimate satisfaction, how can we behold the Lord’s face in righteousness? How can we, who were born as rebel sinners against a Holy God be able to behold His face in righteousness? Remember that when Isaiah the prophet beheld the glory of the Holy God, he knew that he was lost. Have you ever come to the awareness that you are lost spiritually? Romans 3:10 declares that not one of us is righteous. We were all born as lost people and in desperate need of being saved. Those who repent of their sins and call out to the Lord in the name (the authority) of Jesus Christ will be saved (Romans 10:13). “Jesus Christ the Righteous” gave up His life to pay for our sins on the cross. He died and rose again physically from the grave to demonstrate His righteousness. This is why the Apostle Peter described Christians as those “**that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ**” (2 Peter 1:1). So it is only because of the righteousness of our Redeemer that we can behold God’s face in righteousness.

Now when someone becomes a Christian, he has the privilege of beholding the Lord’s face. As the Apostle Paul put it, “**But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord**” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

How is this done?

But let’s be practical. Practically speaking, what does it mean to behold God’s face in righteousness? When you talk to someone in person, have you noticed how it is best when you are face to face? You talk and they listen; you listen as they talk. This is a dialogue, a conversation.

David put this into practice in verses 1-8 and verse 13: he listened to God and talked to God. Today, we can do this by meditation (filling our minds with the words of God) and by praying. Through dwelling on the words of Scripture and talking to God, David was able to face the furies of his foes and find ultimate fulfillment. During our prayer emphasis, we are asking you to read through Donald Whitney’s book, “Praying the Bible.” As you know, the author puts a special emphasis on learning to “pray the psalms.” Let’s look at the way that David did this in Psalm 17.

- In verse 1, he prayed that the Lord would hear the right, which is another way of saying, “Hear my just cause, attend to my cry.” His prayer was earnest, without deceit or

hypocrisy. He knew that the Lord knows all things. David was crying out to the Lord about the evil being done to him – when he knew that he was innocent and yet suffering evil. David knew that he could not deceive God. So he cried out in honest, earnest prayer.

- According to verse 2, David prayed: Let my justice, my just sentence, come forth from Your presence; let Your eyes behold what is equal, just, and upright.
- Look at the way David prayed to God in verse 3: You have proved my heart; you have cleansed me with fire. As Job said, “when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

About this verse one author wrote, “The psalmist believes that he has done nothing to deserve his suffering and that he has not transgressed with his lips against God’s commandments. His prayer is confident, but it is a godly confidence, expressive both of the deepest trust in and of a tender walk with God. Therefore he requests God to “test” his heart, i.e. to put him through every conceivable examination to determine the purity and integrity of the heart.”ⁱⁱ

- We see more about David’s personal commitment, expressed in prayer in verse 4. In essence, he said, “I have purposed that I will not transgress. By the Word of God, I have avoided the paths of the destroyer.” The destructive ways of the destroyers were all around him. But David said that the Word of God protected him and preserved him from imitating those destructive people.
- In verse 5, David expressed his absolute dependence upon the Lord: Uphold my steps in your paths that my footsteps may not slip. Do you see how all of these prayer requests are about beholding God’s face in righteousness? According to verse 6, David prayed with confidence knowing that the Lord would answer him. His absolute dependence on the Lord is on full display in the words of his prayer in verse 7: “Show thy marvelous lovingkindness, O thou that saves by thy right hand those which put their trust *in thee* from those that rise up *against them*.” David leaned upon the loving kindness of his God to face the furies of his foes. Here David is our faithful guide to show us how it is done. So, he prayed in verse 8, “keep me as the apple of your eye” (meaning someone that you love very much); he asked the Lord to cover him, like a mother bird covers her chicks with her strong wings.
- In verse 13, though he was surrounded by evil, David prayed, “Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, [by] your sword.” David the king knew what it was to arise from his throne and take up his sword. In verse 13, he was asking the Lord to do that to defeat his wicked enemies.

So will you behold the face of the Lord in righteousness? Like Peter walking on the waves, or David hiding in the caves, look to the Lord. Like Moses on the shore of the Red Sea, or the disciples in a storm on Galilee, look for the Lord. Like Hannah when she prayed, or Abraham who obeyed, wait on the Lord. In this world of empty pleasures and evil forces, we have learned how to face the furies of our foes. But we still need to find fulfillment. Where can we find ultimate satisfaction?

3. I WILL BE SATISFIED

As our guide on this journey, the psalmist wrote, “I shall be satisfied.” How can we say the same thing? When will this happen?

A. WHEN I AWAKEN

What did David mean by the phrase, "... when I awaken?" He was pointing to the fact that ultimate fulfillment cannot be found in this empty world. By the word, "awaken," he was describing his confidence in his resurrection. David knew that he would not find real satisfaction – ultimate fulfillment – in this present life. But he would find it at the resurrection from the dead. And this satisfaction would not be in something earthly; it would be eternal. This assurance of eternal satisfaction highlights the importance of persevering in this present life – by beholding God's face in righteousness. In the end of the great resurrection chapter (1 Corinthians chapter 15), the apostle Paul wrote, **"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"** (1 Corinthians 15:58). Your labors are not in vain in the Lord; you will find ultimate satisfaction in Him. But how will we be satisfied?

B. WITH YOUR LIKENESS

The apostle John wrote, **"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is"** (1 John 3:2). The prophet, Daniel, described the resurrection of believers this way: **"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament [the sky]; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever"** (Daniel 12:3). This is why the apostle Paul wrote that all creation is waiting for the manifestation [or ultimate revealing] of the sons of God (Romans 8:19).

At the great resurrection it will be said of God and His people, **"they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God"** (Revelation 21:3). Here is ultimate fulfillment and ultimate satisfaction. Those who place all their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and behold His face in righteousness will be satisfied with His likeness. How do we endure our dissatisfaction with this day and age? Wait for it. Between all this emptiness and all this evil, where is satisfaction for your soul to be found? Behold His face in righteousness by reading God's Word and praying. Psalm 17 shows you how to face furious evil with prayer and perseverance in order to find ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment. At the resurrection, in your glorified body, you will bear the likeness of your Savior, Jesus Christ. And you will be satisfied.

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ⁱ John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Psalms* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 130.

ⁱⁱ Kenneth L. Barker, "The Expositor's Bible Commentary," Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 813