

Psalm 7 “Judge Me According to My Righteousness?” November 9, 2014
Psalm 17
Revelation 2

Introduction: How to Sing a Song of Innocence

I love how the Psalms do this!

Psalm 6 recognized that I *deserve* judgment –
and so I ask God to be *gracious*.

We have sinned.
We deserve *many* of the bad things that come our way.

But Psalm 7 points out that we do not deserve *everything* that happens to us!
No teenage girl *deserves* to be kidnapped and forced to marry an Islamic fighter.
No one *deserves* to be publicly slandered for something they didn't do.
No one *deserves* to be bullied and abused.

So sometimes it is important to say, “No, in *this situation*, I am innocent!”
But that's not all that Psalm 7 is saying!
Otherwise, you'd wind up with two lists:
 “here are all the situations where I have sinned” (the guilty list),
 and “there are all the situations where I am in the right” (the innocent list).
Sometimes the guilty list would be longer –
 sometimes the innocent list would be stronger –
 but that would only produce hopelessness and despair!
How can I be “good enough” for God!?

Our Psalm of response, Psalm 17, helps us with this.
Psalm 17 is also a song for the innocent –
 using many of the same themes as Psalm 7.
But notice how Psalm 17 ends:
 “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;
 when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.”
I do not put my confidence in my own feeble performance.
My confidence is in my rock, my refuge, my fortress –
 the LORD Jesus Christ!

Sing Psalm 17
Read Revelation 2

Think about what Jesus says here to the church in Thyatira:
 “I will give to each of you according to your works.” (v23)
 “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end,
 to him I will give authority over the nations,
 and he will rule them with a rod of iron,

as when earthen pots are broken in pieces,
even as I myself have received authority from my Father.” (v26-27)

A few weeks ago, Blair showed us this promise from Psalm 2.
God promised that his anointed Son – the Davidic King –
would rule the nations with a rod of iron.
And that’s what *Jesus* does.

But here, Jesus says that he will give authority over the nations
to *the one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end.*

After all, Jesus rules the nations by *subduing us to himself*,
by ruling and defending us,
and by restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

And so yes, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus!
Which means that *his authority* is given to us as well.

He has united us to himself so that just as he became all that we are *by nature*,
even so, we might become all that he is *by grace*.

A Shiggaion^[a] of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.

What is a “shiggaion”?

The word is only used here and in the preface to the song of Habakkuk 3.
It probably has some connection to the idea of lament.

So this is a lament which David sang to the LORD concerning the words of Cush –
a Benjaminite.

There is no one named “Cush” in the story of David –
but there are two people with very similar names –

both of whom appear in the story of Absalom’s rebellion:

- 1) there is Hushai the Archite, David’s friend,
who stays behind in Jerusalem to give bad counsel to Absalom,
and thwart the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam 17);
- 2) and there is the “Cushite” who is sent to tell David that Absalom is dead (2 Sam 18).

Either way, we should sing Psalm 7 with the rebellion of Absalom in view.

Whether the “Cush” of Psalm 7 is Hushai, or the Cushite (or someone else entirely),
Psalm 7 urges us to hear this song in the voice of David, the King,
as he is pursued by his enemies.

What should you do when you are innocent – and yet your enemies are pursuing you?

The first thing is obvious: “flee to God for refuge” (v1-2).

1. What Should You Do When You Are Innocent? (v1-5)

a. “Save Me from All My Pursuers” – Flee to God for Refuge (v1-2)

*7 O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge;
save me from all my pursuers and deliver me,
2 lest like a lion they tear my soul apart,
rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.*

“In you do I take refuge.”

Notice the image!

There’s a lion pursuing me –
who will tear me in pieces if he catches me!

“In you do I take refuge.”

They will tear my soul apart!
And there is none to deliver!

Just imagine being alone in the wilderness –
chased by lions!

As one writer put it:

“I have no warmth, no light, nowhere to turn.
No home. No friends. And now my last ray of hope is extinguished.”
[Lena Wallace]

“lest like a lion they tear my soul apart, rending it in pieces, with none to deliver.”

“O LORD my God, in *you* do I take refuge.”

The word here translated “refuge” is found 25 times in the Psalter--
15 times in book one (the first 41 Psalms)

The theme of refuge is one of the most prominent themes in Book One.

But it’s not just about the word “refuge.”

If you look at Psalms 3-7,
you will notice that only Psalm 5 and Psalm 7 actually use the word refuge,
but all five of them focus on the same idea.

David cries out for deliverance in Psalm 3,
describing Yahweh as a “shield about me.”

In verse 4, he speaks of how Yahweh answered him from his holy hill.

And notice the result:

When God answered David’s prayer,
he lay down and slept—he had found refuge in the care of the Lord.

Psalm 4 called upon God to hear the prayer of the godly,

concluding, “in peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

Psalm 5 concludes “let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them every sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.”

Psalm 6 likewise calls out to God for deliverance..
He speaks of how he floods his bed with tears every night.
But then in verses 8-10 he declares that the Lord has heard his plea,
and therefore his enemies will be driven back.

Psalm 7 starts by declaring, “O Yahweh, my God, in you do I take refuge–
save me from all my pursuers and deliver me!”

So when you are being chased by lions –
when you are hounded by bullies –
when you are abused and slandered –

the first thing you do is flee to the LORD.

O LORD *my God!*
How precious a thing it is to be able to say “my” God!

And then the second thing you do is again – cry out:
“O LORD my God” a second time!

The first time, you cry out to him as your refuge and salvation.
The second time, you cry out in your protestation of innocence!

b. “If I Have Done This” – Take a Self-Maledictory Oath (v3-5)

³ *O LORD my God, if I have done this,
if there is wrong in my hands,
⁴ if I have repaid my friend^[b] with evil
or plundered my enemy without cause,
⁵ let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it,
and let him trample my life to the ground
and lay my glory in the dust. Selah*

This is what is called a “self-maledictory oath.”
‘Malediction’ means ‘evil speaking’ –
so “self-malediction” means “speaking evil words against yourself.”
And the form of verses 3-5 is a standard “oath” form in the Bible.
“If so-and-so has done such-and-such,
then let thus-and-such happen to so-and-so.”
God himself often takes self-maledictory oaths –
essentially saying, ‘may I cease to be God if I do not do what I promise!’

Because, quite frankly,
if God ever failed in his promises, then he *would* cease to be God!

And here, the Psalmist proclaims a curse upon himself if he is guilty.
If I am guilty – if I have done evil to one who was at peace with me –
then let the enemy destroy me.

This is a terrible curse!
“Let him trample my life to the ground
and lay my glory in the dust.”
If I am guilty, let the lions win!

To take refuge in the LORD is to seek justice from him.
Notice that David does not say that he has *never* sinned.
Everyone knows that David had sinned!
He’s *famous* for his sins!

Rather, David says, “If I have done *this*” –
If I am in the wrong in *this case*,
then let him trample my life to the ground.

The self-maledictory oath is designed to vindicate the innocent.
The whole idea of a self-maledictory oath
is that you are calling down death and hell upon yourself if you are guilty.
In other words, you *really* shouldn’t take this oath unless you are *really* innocent!

Probably you’ve heard children on a playground say something like,
“cross my heart and hope to die.”
That’s a self-maledictory oath.
When a child says “cross my heart and hope to die”
they are saying that if they are lying, they want God to send them to hell.

How often do you hear someone say,
“I’m telling the truth – I swear to God!”

That, too, is a self-maledictory oath,
calling God as witness that they are speaking the truth –
as therefore, calling upon God to *judge them* if they are not!

We should be slow and deliberate in taking such oaths.
Jesus warns us against rash oaths
when he says, “Let your yes be yes and your no be no.”
Jesus is not saying that David was wrong for taking a self-maledictory oath.
Rather, Jesus is saying that you need to mean whatever you say –
and so *if* you take a self-maledictory oath,
be prepared to stand before God’s judgment –

because at the final judgment, you will answer for every careless word!

But what should God do when you are innocent?

2. What Should God Do When You Are Innocent? (v6-17)

a. “Arise, O LORD” and Judge the Nations (v6-7)

⁶ *Arise, O LORD, in your anger;*

lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;

awake for me; you have appointed a judgment.

⁷ *Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you;
over it return on high.*

Arise, O LORD –

this is the ancient war cry from the wilderness,

when Moses would say as the ark set forth from camp,

“Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered,

and let those who hate you flee before you.”

Just as when the ark came to rest, Moses would say,

“Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel” (Numbers 10:35-36)

Last week, we heard “Turn, O LORD” (the same word translated “return” in Numbers).

And this week, we hear “Arise, O LORD” (which we also heard in 3:7).

Indeed, we sang “Arise, O LORD” in Psalm 17 –

and we’ll see it again in the next couple weeks in Psalms 9-10.

The phrase “Arise, O LORD” and its variants occur more than 20 times in the Psalms

But they are especially loaded up here at the beginning of the psalter.

The beginning of the psalter has a lot of complaints, laments,

and pleas for God to arise and do something!

But there is also a plea for God to “return”!

Notice verse 7 –

“Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you;
over it return on high.”

As Moses had said – “return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel.”

But here the Psalmist sees God’s return to Israel as his return to his heavenly throne.

When God is seated on his heavenly throne for judgment,

that is when his people may find justice before him.

Think about the picture here:

God is seated in the heavenly court,

with all the assembly of the peoples before him.

This is the picture of the final judgment – the Last Day –
“you have appointed a judgment.”

Notice – it is a *picture* of the final judgment.

It is not the final judgment itself.

All throughout history there are lots of pictures of the final judgment –
pictures of the day when God will make all things right.

It’s true that in this age, we do not see perfect justice.

But from time to time, we see an approximation of that justice.

When David sat on his throne in Jerusalem – that was a picture of God’s justice.

But then, when Absalom and Ahithophel drove him out –
that picture was cast down and trampled in the dust.

And so David asks God to judge him “according to my righteousness.”

b. And Particularly, “Judge Me According to My Righteousness” (v8-11)

⁸ *The LORD judges the peoples;*

judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness

and according to the integrity that is in me.

We sometimes get so focused on the fact that “all have sinned,”

that we tend to be a little suspicious when people claim to be “good.”

We need to beware of the cynicism of the modern temper.

Postmodernism has a deep suspicion of those who claim to be “righteous.”

It’s really all about *power*, isn’t it?

It would be easy to judge David according to the hermeneutic of suspicion.

We see this all the time with divorce.

You hear that “so-and-so” got divorced.

You will always hear someone say, “It takes two to tango” –
as though both parties are equally at fault.

Psalm 7, verse 8, challenges this way of thinking.

David says, “Judge me according to my righteousness
and according to the integrity that is in me.”

Think about David and Ahithophel.

Or David and Absalom!

When Absalom’s sister, Tamar (David’s own daughter), was raped by her half-brother,
David did nothing.

And even worse, David used his royal power

to commit adultery with Ahithophel’s grand-daughter, Bathsheba,
and then tried to cover it up by having her husband, Uriah, murdered.

So certainly David had sinned against both of these men.

Many have pointed out that David is claiming that *in this instance* he is innocent.
And that is true – as far as it goes.

But as verses 9-11 continue to develop the theme of David’s righteousness,
it becomes clear that he is making a bigger statement as well!

⁹ *Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
and may you establish the righteous—
you who test the minds and hearts,^[c]
O righteous God!*
¹⁰ *My shield is with God,
who saves the upright in heart.*
¹¹ *God is a righteous judge,
and a God who feels indignation every day.*

First, notice that God is a righteous judge.
He tests the “minds and hearts” –
or as the Hebrew would put it, “the hearts and kidneys”!

In English, you think with your mind, and you feel with your heart.
In Hebrew, you think with your heart, and you feel with your kidneys.

Jeremiah tells us that “the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt,
who can understand it?
‘I the LORD search the mind and try the heart’” (17:9-10)
(These are the same words as Psalm 7 – literally, I search the heart and try the kidneys!).

You are not competent to judge your own heart.
You can easily get caught up in second-guessing your own motives!
I am not competent to judge myself.
But I am not called to judge myself!
I am called to love God and love my neighbor.

God is the righteous judge.

In a world filled with propaganda and deceit
God alone can vindicate the upright of heart.

But as you look at verses 9 and 10, you realize that we are talking about more than just
“in this instance I’m innocent!”

David is talking about how God will establish the righteous, and bring an end to the wicked.
God saves the upright in heart.

So when David says “judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness,”
what righteousness is he appealing to?

David claimed to be righteous because he was the son of God.

This is the message of Psalm 2 that we saw a couple weeks ago.

Since Israel was called to be the son of God,
and David and his seed were the embodiment of Israel,
the Davidic king was properly called the “Son of God”
–the Messiah (the Anointed One)

Indeed Psalm 8 will speak of humanity in this way:
man was created to be the ruler over all things –
and the Son of David is especially the fulfillment of this.

Jesus Christ, as the divine Son of God, has also come as the human Son of God.

He rules over all things, thereby restoring our place in the creation,
AND glorifying us through participation in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4),
so that we might share with him in the rule of the new creation.

God is a righteous judge.

If he has declared you to be his son–his heir–
then you may flee to him and say “vindicate me, Father!”
Because you have made me your child–because you have declared me righteous,
Vindicate me!
Deliver me from my enemies.

After all, think about David!

There was nothing that David did to “earn” his place as a son of God.
He was the youngest son of Jesse–a shepherd boy.
And yet God raised him up to be King over all Israel.
It was all the work of God’s grace.
David is not saying,
“I’ve been so righteous in myself, that you owe it to me, God!”
No, he comes to God as a son to his father,
and pleads “save me from my enemies”

And because God has saved Jesus –
because God has delivered Jesus from death and raised him up to eternal life –
therefore God saves those who trust in Jesus –
those who are united to him by faith.

And, as the Psalmist puts it in verse 11:

God is indignant.
He sees the injustice of the wicked, and it really ticks him off!

Now, it’s tempting to think that God isn’t really all that indignant.

After all, bad stuff – terrible stuff – happens all the time.

And it doesn't appear that God is doing anything about it!

But that's where it's important to notice *how* God expresses his indignation!
How does God bring justice?

That's where Psalm 7 concludes:

c. And Bring Justice upon the Impenitent (v12-16)

¹² *If a man^[d] does not repent, God^[e] will whet his sword;*

The word for 'repent' is the same word translated "turn" or "return."

We have seen the importance of "returning" several times in these first few Psalms.
As we saw last time,

our only hope for salvation is if *God himself* turns!

Indeed, in the Hebrew it is clear that *our turning* from sin to God
is based on God's own *turning* his face toward us.

We turn from sin to God –

because God has *first* turned toward us and been gracious to us in Jesus.

But of course, there is another sort of "turning."

Look at verse 16.

The one who does not "return" to God

will have his own mischief "return" upon his own head (v16).

¹² *If a man^[d] does not repent, God^[e] will whet his sword;
he has bent and readied his bow;*

¹³ *he has prepared for him his deadly weapons,
making his arrows fiery shafts.*

¹⁴ *Behold, the wicked man conceives evil
and is pregnant with mischief
and gives birth to lies.*

¹⁵ *He makes a pit, digging it out,
and falls into the hole that he has made.*

¹⁶ *His mischief returns upon his own head,
and on his own skull his violence descends.*

Notice that in verses 12-13, we see that *God* is the one who brings judgment –

If a man does not repent – if he does not turn back towards God,
then God will whet his sword, and bend his bow.

It can be tempting sometimes to leave God out of the picture.

We prefer to think of God as only doing "nice" things.

But God is not only the judge (verses 8-11),

he is also the executioner!

Psalm 7 describes Yahweh as a warrior God.
His arrows are fiery shafts – thunderbolts from heaven!

But while God is the judge,
he uses very ordinary means of bringing judgment.

Look at verse 14.
How does God bring judgment?
Through the wicked themselves!

In verse 14, we see how the wicked man conceives evil – he thinks out his plan;
he is pregnant with mischief – his plan matures and grows;
until he then gives birth to lies.

In other words, v14 points out that the process of judgment begins in the heart of the wicked.
If you conceive evil,
then it is not surprising that you are pregnant with mischief,
and you give birth to lies.
But the lie is by nature deceptive – and even self-deceiving.

The wicked does not necessarily *know* that he is carrying a lie.
Absalom and Ahithophel may well have thought that they were doing the right thing!

But when the plan matures – and it's time to give birth –
what comes out?

A lie.

A bad tree cannot produce good fruit.
And a good tree cannot produce bad fruit.

And that's really the point of verses 15-16,
where we see that the wicked prepares a trap for himself.
He falls into the pit that he dug!

There is a certain poetic justice here.
Sin always destroys itself.
It may take a while!
But in the end, sin will self-destruct.

Think about how Satan inspired Judas to betray Jesus to his death –
thereby sending Jesus to the very cross
by which he triumphed over sin, death, and the Devil!

Satan fell into the very pit that he dug for Jesus!

And so:

Conclusion: And So I Will Sing Praise to the Name of the LORD (v17)

¹⁷ *I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness,
and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.*

Give thanks to the LORD!

Give him the thanks that are due to his righteousness!

How is your gratitude coming?

If you are thankful to God for his glorious salvation,
make a point of telling him so!

If you are grateful for the righteousness that he has made known in Jesus,
then sing praises to his name!