

August 27, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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PRAY TO THE GOD WHO MAKES DISTINCTIONS Psalm 5

The other day I was looking at a report card my sister received when she was in the first grade, probably it was 1955. The grading system seemed a bit foreign to me. If I remember correctly, there were letters like “P” for passing, “U” for unacceptable or “N” for needs work. Or something to that effect. Grading was not like that when I went to school. I remember the system as “A” indicated excelling, “B” was above average, “C” indicated the student was doing average work, “D” meant the student did below average work, and “F” was a warning that the student failed the course. I could never understand what happened to the letter “E.” Apparently that letter held no purpose.

When our sons started out in their educational process, I remember that the papers and tests were marked with a “✓” or a “✓+” or a “✓-.” All of these various methods of grading were intended to show that a student was excelling, was doing average work, or needed some encouraging, further instruction, or maybe even a bit of motivation from the board of education applied to the seat of learning, if you know what I mean.

We live in a different day. Many educators and children’s workers are opposed to making any kind of distinctions. They fear that to acknowledge a child’s excellence or to point out a child’s failure is to judge children by an unjust set of standards. After all, what if the child is not gifted in academics or specifically in math, reading, or history but is very gifted in playing video games? To me that borders on the same logic that says teachers ought to reward little tykes who disrupt the class, fight, hit, and lie because they appear to

be gifted in those areas. It is the same wrong-headed thinking that gives rewards or trophies to all participants, not just to winners.

This foolishness is the result of humanistic philosophy that has concluded that there is no absolute truth. If there is no absolute truth, how could you possibly judge a student by comparing him or her with other students? I suppose that $1+1=2$ and $2+2=4$ and so on does not appear to be absolute to these educators. Or what about the absolute truths of physics? If we do not teach our children the absolute truth of gravity, they could be gravely injured. Or what about Newton’s absolute law of inertia that concludes that an object in motion tends to stay in motion and an object at rest tends to stay at rest. That law means that if a person decides to rest on a railroad track and a train is approaching in motion, and if that person does not believe the absolute truth of the law of inertia, he is going to die. That is a rather serious consequence for ignoring absolute truth.

Another absolute truth is that there really are winners and losers in life. No one is going to change that because God who created all things is absolute truth. His character is absolute truth. His laws reflect absolute truth. Therefore, absolute righteousness exists and absolute evil exists. And the rewards for righteousness are absolute as well as the consequences for doing evil.

In the Psalm of our text, David cried out in prayer to God because he believed in God’s absolutes. In these same unchanging truths, we who love the Lord find much encouragement and much reminder for why we trust God and why we pray to Him.

Consider Your Relationship With God as You Pray (vv.1-6).

Do you ever find yourself like David who prayed, “O LORD, hear my cry”? If so, you probably cried out to the LORD for the same reason David did. We who cry out to the LORD understand that He is our King and our God. With that confidence, we request the LORD to consider our deepest feelings. *Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning (v.1).*

Prayer is the practice of speaking words to God. But often those are not audible words, though they could be. Sometimes the words are not words at all but just groanings. Such are our deepest feelings – feelings that are pained or fearful because of trying circumstances.

It is not always possible to even express these deep feelings. Part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the child of God's life is to express these feelings to the Father. God taught us, *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26).*

With such crying, the child of God begs the attention of our King and God. David cried, *Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray (v.2).* Cry out to God our Creator, who, because He is the Creator, understands the creature's need better than we do. We cry out to God our Sustainer who knows everything perfectly and upholds the universe by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3).

Cry out to our King. Is He really the King? God's subjects truly acknowledge God as King only when we act like His subjects. More often than not, the reason we find ourselves crying out to the King is because we have tried to act like we are kings and ended up in trouble. On the other hand, great confidence is found in being able to resort to the King of all creation who controls all things for His glory.

Seek the LORD early. David confessed, *O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch (v.3).* Because of the wording in this verse, it is fair to call this a morning psalm, the kind of song or prayer God's child might pray early in the day. David did that kind of thing frequently, right? Actually, when David said that he would seek the Lord early (Psalm 63:1 KJV) the word *early* he used in that case means earnestly.

Nevertheless, it is a good practice for us to be found in communication with our King at the start of the day. It is a reminder that under the law God required His people to seek His face in the morning when the priests offered the morning sacrifice. God required, *"It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there" (Exodus 29:42).* The same idea is repeated by prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Therefore, it is no wonder the disciples woke up in the morning and, not seeing Jesus, went out to find Him praying (Mark 1:35). People who sense no need to depend on God are seldom found in

prayer. People who recognize the great need to depend on God are typically found crying out to God early and often. Because God loves us, He is prone to permit reasons to pray in our lives. He certainly does not feel toward His children the way He feels toward the devil's children.

As you pray, it might be encouraging to remember that the LORD is opposed to the wicked (vv.4-6). In very blunt terms, God hates wickedness. Observe how the expressions of God's disfavor of sin builds and builds with increasingly strident words in verses four through six. David began by recalling, *For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you (v.4).* Right away we should wonder what constitutes wickedness and what constitutes evil? These words describe sin against God that can be so common that we hardly recognize it or care.

Wickedness in a general sense is a kind of lifestyle that is opposite God's character. In wisdom literature like Proverbs or the Psalms, it is contrasted with righteousness. Wickedness is the character of a criminal, one who has no regard for law. In that sense, all people who sin against God by disregarding His law are wicked. Evil is defined by so many negative words like bad, disagreeable, malignant, and the results of evil – misery and distress.

For David to conclude that God is not like that is a bit of an understatement. There are some gods who delight in such things. The mythical ancient gods or man's inventions not only tolerate evil, but favor evil. Those make-believe gods are as wicked as their inventors were. Standing in vivid contrast to the gods man created in his own image is the only true God who will not tolerate sin forever. He shows no emotional favor toward wickedness. He will not let evil abide in His presence like an alien living temporarily in a foreign country. This is the principle of God having no fellowship with sin that the Apostle John taught us. *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth (1 John 1:6).*

It is as God concluded when He looked at the pre-flood wickedness of the world. *Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years" (Genesis 6:3).* God endures evil and wickedness only so long in individuals and so long in the universe. An end is determined.

At this point in the psalm the negative traits of sinners really start to build up. Because of His righteous nature, God must be opposed to people who do wickedness. God will not endure the boastful. *The boastful shall not stand before your eyes (v.5a)*. Evil and wickedness is displayed as pride and boastfulness. Sinners boast in their abilities, in comparison to others, and even in the ability to live without God. They do not have the privilege of standing in the presence of God like His angels do (Job 1:6; 2:1).

Such boasting is not insignificant and God does care about it. In a very blunt statement David declared that God hates people who do evil. The words *you hate all evildoers (v.5b)* jump off the page at us. This is a difficult statement to hear and to understand. How can we interpret this statement in light of John 3:16? If God loves the world so much that He sent the Beloved Son to die for our sins, how can He hate evildoers? Is it possible to love and hate at the same time?

Let's take a moment and consider what we are talking about. To hate is to show a strong dislike of, an aversion to, a desire to be away from. In contrast, love draws the person toward self, enjoys the company of the person. We know that God hates sin, especially idolatry which replaces Him with something manmade. To that end God finally revealed that He hated the very feasts and gatherings He required of the people (Amos 5:17) because the people were not submissive to or focused on God in their so-called worship of God.

So what did God say in this statement? Through David God pointed out that He has a strong aversion to, desires to be away from, out of the company of people who do *evil*. In this verse David used a different Hebrew word for evil than he did in verse four. This word speaks of causing trouble, sorrow, emptiness because of wickedness (the opposite of righteousness). This kind of evil is best illustrated by idolatry, the replacing of God.

Quite pointedly the text says that God hates the people who do this evil. We dare not forget that God will judge real people for their evil, not just judge Satan the father of evil or judge just the concept of evil. Hear the pleas of real people on that day of judgment. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in*

your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23). See the eternal plight of real people not just concepts as God casts death and people into the lake of fire. John saw that in the future, *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:14-15)*.

The only accurate conclusion must be that God loves these people so much that He took the initiative to provide the very best, eternal life, at the infinite cost of self-sacrifice. But people who insist on replacing God with their idolatry and self-idols, do evil which causes God to have a strong aversion toward them for eternity.

Therefore, it also stands that God destroys those who speak lies. *You destroy those who speak lies (v.6a)*. Most of us agree that telling untruth about others is unacceptable. Speaking untruth about God, denying God's person, character, and work results in eternal destruction. Why such severe judgment? Because God abhors haters and liars. *The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man (v.6b)*. To abhor is to consider something abominable, horrifically repulsive. That is how God feels toward people who shed blood for selfish reasons (like those who attack the innocent or abort babies). God abhors people who deceive others for their personal gain.

We must bear in mind that this list is not David's opinion, but God's inspired self-description. If we come to grips with the seriousness of these words, we will most importantly fear to be characterized by evil ourselves. A good grasp of this reality will make us flee sin. It will drive us to full dependance on God and an abhorrence of pride and self-dependance. If we really believe the words of this psalm, we will truly fear for individuals who are evil.

That God offers such a dramatically opposite choice (evil and judged vs. obedient and blessed) is not an odd or astonishing conclusion. To offer a stark contrast between two choices is obvious with God in history. God presented to Adam and Evil a tree that gave the experience of good and evil. If they were obedient to God, they would only know good. If they chose to disobey God, they would set up a choice between good and evil for all of us.

In the same way Moses set before the people a choice – good or evil. “*See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess*” (Deuteronomy 30:15-18).

David could challenge us with the words Joshua spoke to his people at this point: Choose you this day whom you will serve.

Praise God for His Imposed Distinctions (vv.7-12).

God has a plan for the people He described in the previous verses in such negative ways. Regarding God’s enemies, God reveals that they are self-willed, rejecting God. *For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue* (v.9). God will repay their rebellion according to verse ten. Do these seem like harsh requests from David, God’s servant? *Make them bear their guilt O God* (v.10a); *Let them fall by their own counsels* (v.10b).

Why does it seem David showed such lack of compassion? *Because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out* (v.10c), *For they have rebelled against you* (v.10d). Oh! This is not a matter of personal vengeance. David was not simply angry with people who were attacking him.

This is an example of a difficult and precarious situation. On one hand, evil, wicked, deceitful, blood thirsty people were lying about David and desiring to kill him (i.e. Absalom and his army and counselors). If it was just an attack against David the individual, he could commit himself to God and say, “The Lord’s will be done.” But David was the man who God chose to express as His will for His people. God made David the king because it was His will. The evil people were attacking God’s choice, rejecting God’s will, and,

therefore, attacking God Himself. They were doing exactly what David refused to do toward Saul.

So David cried out to God. David poured out his soul. David was deeply concerned that evil people were getting away with rejecting God. But still he could rest in God’s care. We who love the Lord should be so encouraged by these statements that reveal God’s relationship regarding His beloved. We will worship the LORD. *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 words translated, “*I will enter Your house*” really is equivalent to us saying, “I will go to church.” Church is the gathering of God’s people in God’s presence to worship God. That is what the temple represented. When the enemy attacks, when it looks like evil will win, when we have poured out our hearts to God, it is good to then meet with God’s people.

When we enter God’s house, we will worship in fear. The words “bow down” are the perfect description of worship. The most common Hebrew word for worship literally means to bow down, to stoop, to wallow, to prostrate oneself. A right and awesome respect for God will stimulate that kind of response. So much so-called worship of God today is actually worship of self, worship of performers. Many people gather in corporate religious assemblies to exalt performers, to praise speakers. This is no less than idolatry – the kind of thing God hates. True worship will always be generated by an accurate understanding and response to God. How can people who despise the concept of fearing God even begin to worship Him? They can’t.

We are able to faithfully participate in corporate worship only because of God’s steadfast love. It is God’s unchanging desire to do what is best for us even at the cost of His own sacrifice. Only because of God’s steadfast love are we able to bow in awesome respect before Him.

This almost looks like a huge paradox! First, we must come to grips with the certainty that we are God’s enemy and He will destroy us for eternity because of our evil desire to replace Him with our own kingship. But then, when we realize our condition, we are suddenly overwhelmed by God’s amazing love for us. This means that we

cannot grasp or appreciate God's amazing grace and mercy until we are crushed by God's law. Because God has poured out His grace and love in our hearts, we bow our hearts before Him in worship.

And what does our corporate worship look like? The people who take refuge in the LORD rejoice. *But let all who take refuge in you rejoice (v.11a)*. What does rejoicing look like? Ask the prisoners who witnessed Paul and Silas singing and praising God while they were in jail. Rejoicing looks like rejoicing. The people who experience the LORD's protection sing for joy. *Let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them (v.11b)*.

Maybe there are two important issues that help us maintain a balance in joyful worship. Do I really express joy in unemotional "dry" singing? Do I really focus on the God who protects me when I abandon control to emotionalism? Our worship is to be an expression of incredible joy offered in respect to the incredibly righteous God.

Furthermore, the people who love God's name exult in Him. We rejoice and we sing for joy so *that those who love your name may exult in you (v.11c)*. True worship is not about exalting people who love themselves and are concerned only for their situation. Worship is done by people who desire only the best for God's reputation. We have an emotional response to the One we love.

And because of God's steadfast love to us, we can ask for the LORD to make our path clear. *Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me (v.8)*. Because we know there are people who desire to attack our reputation for loving God, we need to be sure about the path we walk. Pray that God will make His pathway, His will for your life clear, straight, and obvious.

Do we have a right to ask for such leading? Of course, because the LORD favors the righteous. That is the blessed distinction God makes. *For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield (v.12)*. What a contrast with God's response to the wicked! How can we understand and value God's favor? His grace to us is like a shield in battle. Lord help us to see how large your grace is.