

“Help, Lord, for the Godly Ceases to Be”
(Psalm 12)

Introduction: I would like to begin the sermon on this passage of Scripture by looking at its end. In verse 8, David writes, “The wicked strut about on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men.” Now, can you think of a better commentary on our generation, than this? Can you think of anything that describes our age more appropriately? If you don’t think that the wicked are strutting about on every side, you haven’t been watching the news lately. You haven’t visited San Francisco, or been to Santa Cruz lately. If you don’t see this, you haven’t really learned yet to discern between good and evil, even between that which may be called morally upright and that which is truly righteous. If the personal righteousness of the best saint is but filthy rags in the sight of God, as you consider the saints in and of themselves, how much more detestable in the sight of God is the supposed uprightness of the unconverted man? The wicked are more and more coming out of the closet. They are flaunting their evil deeds before God and man.

But notice what David says is the condition under which the wicked become bold. They do so “when vileness is exalted among the sons of men.” Man will always express the degree of wickedness of his wickedness that society will allow. Generally, they will only go as far as the culture will tolerate. There is much more evil in their hearts than you see on the surface. We know that this is true of us. How much more then of them? Parents, this should give you cause for concern with regard to your children. Don’t be deceived into thinking that your child is converted simply because he or she has learned to live within the boundaries of your standards. It isn’t until a child begins to do what is right, because it is right and pleasing to God and because they really want to in their hearts, that there is any evidence that they are converted. What really shows us that this is the case is when the children become adults and begin to direct their own lives. Then we begin to see just how deeply the principles of Christ have penetrated their hearts.

In the situation in which we live, society will set some restraints, but as those restraints continue to erode, so will the so-called “morals” of most people. The sad thing about it is that as the societal standards wane, the church’s standards are not far behind.

This is a sad age for this country and for the Lord’s church. Many of our country’s leaders are ungodly and immoral at best. If the political platform of one of the major political parties is not enough to convince you of that fact, then just consider the results of the sexual scandal of our president. It seems as though every politician’s skeleton has come out of the closet to haunt them. Consider also the media which continually pumps out more and more moral filth under the name of entertainment. Virtually all of it reflects an atheistic and evolutionary world view. These influences are not only affecting the non-Christian segment of our culture, but the church as well. You cannot live in an unclean world and touch the unclean things and expect not to be changed by it. This accounts for the continual erosion and the deprecating of Christian values which we see all around. Even a mildly conservative platform, such as Christian Coalition, stands out in stark contrast to the morass of sin which our country has fallen into.

Now it is in light of this that I want us to look at this Psalm this evening. As I have mentioned in the past, the book of Psalms is always the best book of the Bible to go to when you

want to know what your response should be to ungodliness, temptation and persecution. It is reassuring, in many ways, to know that we are not the first to deal with these situations, that there are others who profess the true religion and who are members of the household of God, who have had to go through situations which are similar to ours. As I was reading the psalms this week, this particular one struck me. And I believe that it will give to us a measure of relief, as we take the time to meditate on it this evening. What it tells us is that,

Even though the world seems to be sinking down into a cesspool of sin, and even though the righteous are increasingly persecuted, the Lord is faithful to His Word, and He will deliver us.

I. Notice first of all the complaint which the psalmist pours out to the Lord.

- A. The psalmist does what must be done first of all: He cries out to the only One who can do anything about the situation. He says, “Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases to be, for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.”
 1. The psalmist noticed the religious erosion in his own day.
 - a. The faithful were becoming fewer and fewer.
 - b. There could scarcely be found a godly man. Those who were faithful to the covenant of God were disappearing.
 - c. It sounds very much like the plea of Elijah, where he says, “Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life” (Rom. 11:3).
 - d. We must be thankful that the Lord, in His mercy and by His grace, always reserves for Himself a remnant in every age. Paul writes concerning Elijah, “But what is the divine response to him? ‘I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal’” (v. 4).
 - e. But sometimes the faithful cannot be seen. Sometimes it may seem like you are the only one who still desires to see the glory of the Lord again shine in multitudes rejoicing in and obeying God’s holy commandments. But there are others. God has a remnant. And we must be thankful that He has.
 - f. But this passage may also be turned around to shine its light on our own hearts, to reveal our own sin. Charles Bridges once wrote, “‘The faithful.’ ‘A faithful man,’ as a parent, a reprover, an adviser, one ‘without guile,’ ‘who can find?’ Prov. 20:6. Look close. View yourself in the glass of the word. Does your neighbor or your friend, find you faithful to him? What does our daily intercourse witness? Is not the attempt to speak what is agreeable often made at the expense of truth? Are not the professions of regard sometimes utterly inconsistent with our real feelings? In common life, where gross violations are retrained, a thousand petty offences are allowed, that break down the wall between sin and duty, and, judged by the divine standard, are indeed guilty steps upon forbidden ground” (*Treasury* 1:144).
 - g. Are we faithful to the Lord? Have not the influences of this world also taken their toll on us, so that we are oftentimes torn between the things of this world and the things of God?
 - h. Jesus has told us that we must be hot with regard to holy things. He will not have us as cold or lukewarm. If we are lukewarm, John tells us, He will vomit us out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16).

- i. If we are to see any change in those around us, we must first of all see a change in ourselves.
 - j. David was a righteous man, and righteousness was what he desired to see.
2. And so, David here does that which is the only proper thing to do, the same thing which Elijah did in his situation, he called upon the Lord for help. “Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases to be.”
- a. The word is literally “save.” Save, O Lord!”
 - b. Deliver me from evil men. Send forth Thy Spirit and renew the face of the land.
 - c. Who is it after all who makes a man godly and who exalts righteousness, but the Spirit of the Lord?
 - d. He says, “Lord, deliver us from our sins, for you alone can do it.”
- B. David then begins with his complaint. “They speak falsehood to one another; with flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.”
1. This is how the wicked are often depicted in the Scriptures, as men who have unclean lips, motivated by an unclean heart.
- a. Consider what the apostle Paul says concerning all men, “Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Rom. 3:13-14).
 - b. The devil is called a serpent, and he has the sting of a serpent in his tongue. He is a liar and the father of all lies.
 - c. The greatest evil in the world is perpetrated through the wrong use of words. James writes, “And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).
2. But remember what the Savior said, “But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man” (Matt. 15:18). We should not be surprised then to find David linking these two ideas together. If a man’s heart is full of hell, his tongue will set what it touches on fire.
- a. In the Hebrew, the text reads literally, “They speak emptiness, a man with his neighbor, with the lip of flatterers, with a heart and a heart, they speak.”
 - b. What is meant by being double-hearted, or by having a heart and a heart, is that there is more than one intention behind what they say. When they speak, there is an ulterior motive to their flattery.
 - c. It is believed by some that the context of this psalm is the situation in which Saul had killed the priests of the Lord in his attempt to find and destroy David. If so, we can easily see how David could apply this to Saul. Here was a man who professed the true religion and was even a leader of God’s people. And yet in his unrighteous and wicked anger, he lifted up his hands against the priests of the Lord and destroyed eighty-five of them in one day. David is not here writing about the nations who do not know God, but of the Old Testament church!
 - d. About this kind of hypocrisy among those who profess to be Christians, Griffith Williams once wrote, “The feigned zeal is just like a waterman (a man who rows a boat or steers a ferry), that looks one way and rows another way; for this man

pretends one thing and *intends* another thing; as Jehu pretended the zeal of God's glory, but his aim was at his master's kingdom; and his zeal to God's service was but to bring him to the scepter of the kingdom. So Demetrius professed great love to Diana, but his drift was to maintain the honour of his profession; and so we have too many that make a great show of holiness, and yet their hearts aim at other ends; but they may be sure, though they can deceive the world . . . yet not God, who knows the secrets of all hearts" (*Treasury* 1:145).

- e. Thomas Adams wrote of this passage, "The original is, 'A heart and a heart:' one for the church, another for the change; one for Sundays, another for working-days; one for the king, another for the pope. A man without a heart is a wonder, but a man with two hearts is a monster. It is said of Judas 'There were many hearts in one man;' and we read of the saints, 'There was one heart in many men.' Acts 4:32" (*Treasury* 1:145).

II. Having seen the situation in which David wrote, and the complaint which he pours out to the Lord, let us now look at his profession of confidence.

- A. He first speaks of their end at the hands of the Lord's justice. "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things; who have said, 'With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?'"
 - 1. The NASB translates this verse as a prayer, a prayer in which David asks that the Lord would destroy those who flatter, who use their lips to deceive, that He would cut them off from the earth.
 - a. That translation is certainly possible. It is not unusual to find within the psalms, these prayers of imprecation, asking for the removal of the wicked from the earth.
 - b. And certainly we should pray and ask that the Lord would bring His kingdom and destroy the kingdom of the wicked one.
 - 2. But another possibility is that this is simply a statement, "The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips."
 - a. We know that this is true as well. When the Lord establishes His kingdom fully, those who are given to lying and flattery, will be cut off forever.
 - b. But David was speaking of a situation which may very well come in his time, for there are those breakings in of the kingdom of God into history which foreshadow that great event at the end of days.
 - c. Those who cast off the Lordship of Christ over their tongues, and who use their mouths as instruments of unrighteousness shall be cut off.
 - d. Spurgeon wrote, "May there not be here an allusion to those terrible but suggestive punishments which Oriental monarchs were wont to execute on criminals? Lips were cut off and tongues torn out when offenders were convicted of lying or treason. So terrible and infinitely more so are the punishments of sin" (*Treasury* 146).
 - e. And George Horne comments, "They who take pleasure in deceiving others, will at the last find themselves most of all deceived, when the Sun of truth, by the brightness of His rising, shall at once detect and consume hypocrisy" (*ibid.*).
- B. But secondly, the Lord interjects a comment by way of direct speech. "'Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the needy, now I will arise,' says

the Lord; 'I will set him in the safety for which he longs.'"

1. It is not unusual in the psalms for the writer to switch between his own speech and that of the Lord's.
 - a. This doesn't mean that there is a switch in authority, for it is all inspired by God.
 - b. But it does mean a switch in the person speaking.

2. God, as it were, interjects His promise to David that He will surely vindicate the innocent and deliver him from his adversaries.
 - a. God makes it clear in the Scripture that He is a god of justice who judges rightly. He is the defender of the weak and the afflicted. And because He is, He also requires those who rule to do likewise.
 - b. The psalmist writes in Psalm 82:1-4, "God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers. How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver *them* out of the hand of the wicked." Do this because you rule in the place of God, as His ministers of justice.
 - c. These were surely words of comfort to David who felt very keenly the persecution of Saul.
 - d. But these words equally apply to us. When we feel the weight of the world's sins pressing down upon us, when we groan over the injustice and abominable acts of our culture, we know that the Lord hears and that He will deliver us.
 - e. Remember what the Lord did for Lot? He rescued him from the midst of a city, whose abominations were not that much different than ours. Peter writes, "And if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by which he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Pet. 2:7-9).
 - f. God will arise, when the sins of this nation have filled up the cup of His wrath, and He will judge them, and deliver His people.
 - g. The fact that we see so much wickedness of this type going on in the Whitehouse, in branches of our government, and widespread among the people at large, is already an indication that the Lord is leaving us to our sins, that He might bring His judgment upon us.

- C. Lastly, David reinforces his confidence by meditating on the truth of God's Word. "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. Thou, O Lord, wilt keep them; Thou wilt preserve him from this generation forever."
 1. In sharp contrast to the words of the wicked which are full of falsehood and flattery, the Lord's speech is true and pure.
 - a. There is nothing false in them. There are no impurities.
 - b. They are like silver which has gone through the refiner's fire seven times, until all of the dross has been removed.
 - c. They are words which may be trusted, because they are backed by the God of

infinite truth.

2. The wicked may think that with their tongues they will prevail, but the Lord is faithful to His Word, and He has promised that He will keep that Word, that He will preserve His afflicted from this generation, forever.
 - a. So what then should be our response in this age of increasing wickedness and evil? Should we adopt a defeatist attitude and cower in the corner, fearful of the wicked? Or should we stand in the confidence which the Lord gives us in His Word?
 - b. I believe that it would be appropriate for us to follow the example which David here gives us, for it is a righteous and God-centered solution.
 - c. We must believe that though the wicked strut about now on every side, that they shall not do so forever. The Lord has His plans and His times. He allows the wicked to flourish now only that He might destroy them forever.
 - d. We must believe in God's Word, we must trust in Him, and we must call upon Him, through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come in power, to destroy the wicked and to vindicate the righteous.
 - e. We must pray pleading His promises, for the Lord is faithful, and He can do great and mighty things through His people, if we are but faithful to take Him at His Word.
 - f. May the Lord then give us courage and strength to engage the battle in the name of our sovereign Lord, Jesus Christ, and may He encourage us through His promises that He will surely keep us and enable us to overcome. Amen.