

Psalms 17

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[0 : 0 0] Do sit. And open your Bibles up to Psalm 17. Psalm 17. I'm away next Sunday in that I'm doing a swap with Andy Longway, who's the Minister of London City Presbyterian Church.

! That'll be great for you. He's a great guy. And so I wanted to, we've just finished our series in 2 Timothy, and I want to preach on Psalm 17.

We preach in different ways, I hope. And so sometimes we do big chunks, which we've done in Micah in the evenings, and sometimes we do smaller chunks. Sometimes we spend a bit more time focusing and diving into the part of your Word.

We're going to try and do that on Psalm 17 for maybe three sermons. I think one of the emphasis that we lack as a church, well I do that personally, is that of yearning.

The Christian faith is one of yearning. And I think probably, if you look around, as a Christian church in this country, we've lost that aspect of yearning.

[1 : 0 5] What does yearning mean? You know kids, when you get in from school, you're on your way home from school and you're starving. Do you remember that feeling? And you'd get in and you would devour the bread from the bread bin.

That feeling of yearning, hangering, thirsting. And the Christian faith is one of yearning. And I think Psalm 17 is a yearning prayer.

Look at the middle of Psalm 17. It's such a beautiful psalm. Verse 17. Can you hear the yearning? Wondrously show your steadfast love.

That is what we're yearning for. We're yearning for God's love. We're yearning to be loved by God. We're yearning to know God's love.

And as I looked at various translations of this psalm, I came across Eugene Peterson's translation in the message. The message is more lively. It's kind of more dynamic.

[2 : 0 8] Sometimes it takes a few liberties. But listen to how Eugene Peterson renders verses 6 to 7. He says this. He says, I call to you, God, because I'm sure of an answer.

So answer. Bend your ear. Listen sharp. Paint grace graffiti on our fences. Take in your frightened children who are running from the neighborhood bullies straight to you.

Now, I'm no Hebrew scholar, but I'm pretty sure that that's not 100% literal Hebrew translation. But you've got to love the picture it paints, haven't you? He gets it. God's wondrous love is like painting grace graffiti on your fence, on your walls.

Protecting you from neighborhood bullies. And so in the woodshed at the back of my house, there's two silver doors. And some, I assume it's a young person, goes out and paints graffiti on them occasionally.

I've never caught them. But it's never grace graffiti. It's never words of love and words of compassion. I don't know whether you've seen much graffiti.

[3 : 1 8] There's a fair bit of it around Hanwell. But not much graffiti is full of love. Doesn't happen that way. I'm not telling you this afternoon to go out with your can of paint and spray over the walls.

It wouldn't go down well. But the idea, can you see it, of painting grace graffiti. That's what he's asking God to do. That's what he's yearning for God to do. And Psalm 17 is a prayer.

You can pick that up right up from the start. But it's a sorrowful prayer that's really, can you help me? And I expect for many of you here who are sitting listening to me, and certainly some of you who are watching online who are unwell, you have prayed tears.

And you've prayed this weeping prayer to God. Please help me. It's what we would call an individual lament. The psalmist, David, he feels he's alone.

He feels he's under attack. And again, for many of you who are watching, for many of you who are sitting here this morning, you know what that feels like. At a certain point in the psalm, he says, it

feels like I'm being torn apart.

[4 : 28] And so what I want to do this morning is really just introduce Psalm 17 to go through six major themes. It's always really reassuring, isn't it, when I say that. But part of my aim in preaching Psalm 17 is I want to preach a short sermon.

So six major themes that I think are really present in this psalm. And we'll come back in two weeks' time and look at specifically a little bit more of what it means to be loved by God, what it means to be the apple of God's eye.

And so there's a yearning, I think, for six things. Let me give them to you. Yearning number one is that God would hear me. Yearning number two is that God would recognize my integrity, that I'm living an authentic Christian life, David says.

Yearning number three is a yearning to be loved. Yearning number four is a yearning against the heartlessness of other people which we sometimes experience. And yearning number five, which will make you just a little bit uncomfortable, and yet we need to recognize that the Bible clearly teaches it, is the right yearning for vengeance.

That's God's vengeance. That is to say we want God's judgment to come. We yearn for his vengeance. And number six is the final yearning, and it's the ultimate yearning of the human heart.

[5 : 40] It's to see God. In church history, it's been called the beatific vision. It's a yearning to see God, that when we see him, we should be like him.

So let's go through these six points quickly. Number one, there's a yearning for God to hear you. Do you yearn for that? Look at verse one.

Hear a just cause, O Lord. Attend to my cry. He literally says, Hear, O Lord, righteousness.

Hear, O Lord, righteousness. So David is not simply saying, Life is unfair. He's not just crying about his sorrows, or his grief, or his suffering is unfair.

That is right, and that's fair enough to pray. But what he's praying is that God would hear him, and begin to put things right by righteousness. You cry sometimes like that, don't you?

[6 : 45] I've sat with you, when you've cried like that, that God would hear you. And hearing you, God would put things right, because he is a righteous God. There is such a thing as righteousness.

There is a righteous cause in life, and God is the one, isn't it, who takes up the cry of those who look to him. He hears those who cry for righteousness.

Hear me when I'm crying, and God takes up that cause. Now we know that, don't we, from other parts of the Bible. God hears the cry of the widow. God hears the cry of the orphan.

He hears the cry of the brokenhearted. He takes up the cause of those who are wounded, and bruised. He takes up the cause of the oppressed, and the poor, and the hurt, and the vulnerable, and the broken.

And I think that is part of David's plea. Hear me, O Lord, O hear righteousness. You yearn, the true believer does, for God to hear you. But there's something more here as well, isn't there?

[7 : 55] It's not just simply that God would hear me, and act in righteousness. Along with his plea to be heard, comes this astonishing statement. A really shocking, and astonishing plea, that God would recognize that David's living an authentic life.

And this second plea is a plea from David, that God would not only hear him, but that God would recognize his integrity. Look at verses four and five.

With regard to the works of man, by the words of your lips, I've avoided the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast to your paths.

My feet have not slipped. It really is, isn't it, an astonishing statement of integrity. You may read it, and you might think, well, David was a very, very great man, wasn't he?

Great King David. He could claim such integrity, but we know, don't we, as we read David's life story, he was a great sinner. Just as you and I are sinners, how can he say these things? How can he say, I didn't join in with the violence?

[9 : 06] My feet haven't slipped. What kind of claim is this? Would you ever dare to claim such integrity? And some of us read that, and we think, wait a minute, this sounds very much like boasting on hypocrisy.

Many of us suffer from doubts, don't we? We're afraid that people will accuse us of being imposters. We're always afraid of being called hypocrites. There's a title for that, isn't there? There's a phrase for this kind of feeling. It's called imposter syndrome, you know? It's a kind of chronic self-doubt where I feel a kind of fraud, and everyone one day is going to find out that I'm a fraud.

If people came to my house just for a few hours, they would know that I couldn't claim such integrity. Some of us feel that, don't we? Some of you are crushed by that feeling. And I think it's really important for us to understand that as Christians, we know that we're not perfect. A Christian is someone who knows that she sins.

[10:18] That's why it's a great reminder, isn't it, week by week that we corporately confess our sin together. But a Christian also knows that there are times when they are innocent.

When it comes to a particular suffering or a particular trial. So think of Job, for example. Job was such a man, isn't it? Job suffered such great trials, not because he was a fraud, but because Job was for real.

He was genuine. He was for real. He was living an authentic, faithful, God-fearing life. And yet suffering came to Job.

You may be afraid, as many people are afraid, that people will get to know the real you and they'll see you for a fraud. They'll find grief in your heart or sorrow in your soul.

And because they find suffering, they'll think, ah, you can't be for real. Proverbs says this, a great little proverb, it says this, the crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold.

[11:27] It's nothing to do with a snooker. Crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold. But suffering, what that's saying to you is this, it's saying to you that suffering does not mean that you are worthless.

Suffering does not mean that you are worthless. It doesn't mean that your children are worthless. suffering often means that you are of more value to God.

That you are more precious than gold. That you are worth more than silver. Suffering is a reminder that you are precious to Him.

And so, in verse 17, David is expressing this yearning to be heard, but he's also expressing this yearning to be known. And to be known not to be a fraud or a fake, that is a good yearning, isn't it? That is a yearning which takes us to the Lord Jesus. And the third theme that's stated in verse 17 is in verse 7 and 8. It's the theme of our yearning to be loved.

[12:29] We'll look at this in a couple of weeks, but wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior, of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand. Verse 8, keep me.

Hear the yearning. Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings. It's a beautiful description, isn't it? It's a beautiful scripture about being loved by God and being kept safely under the shadow of His wings.

We'll come back to it in a couple of weeks, but can you see that yearning to be loved, that yearning to be enveloped in the grace of God, a yearning to be heard, a yearning to be known and not be a fraud, a yearning to be loved, and here's a yearning to be free of the heartlessness of other people. I suspect for some of you this morning, nothing is more hurtful than the way other people have treated you. Perhaps nothing has been more hurtful to you than to see the way other people have treated your family or your children.

It can be soul-crushing, can't it? But I want you to listen to how David expresses this in verse 8. Keep me as the apple of your eye.

[13:52] Hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me. They close their hearts to pity. With their mouths they speak arrogantly. They've now surrounded our steps.

They've set their eyes to cast us to the ground. He is like a lion eager to tear as a young lion lurking in ambush. I wonder whether you've experienced what David has experienced here.

The heartlessness. Maybe some of you have got memories of school. Maybe some of you have received it in hospitals. Heartlessness.

Maybe from colleagues. Maybe there can even be a heartlessness in churches. There can be heartlessness, can't there, in some families. People without pity.

People who speak arrogantly at you. People who seem to be crowding around you ready to pounce at you when something goes wrong and he yearns to be free of that heartlessness of other people.

[14:57] Look closely at verses 11 and 12. Verse 11 is plural. They have now surrounded our steps. They have set their eyes to the ground.

Can you see how it's plural? It's like a whole committee full of people, like a whole room full of people ready to pounce in their heartlessness. But then he moves into verse 12 and it's singular.

It's almost as if the crowd, in that crowd there's always one face. There's always one person who's getting in your face. And so in verse 12 he is like a lion eager.

He's like a lion working in ambush. Sometimes you're surrounded by a whole crowd of heartlessness but what really hurts is when it's one person's face.

One face that's always in your face. And that, David feels that too. There may be many people around you who are heartless but often the pain of it focuses in one snarling face.

[16:03] One snarling phone call. One sniping email. You know what this is, isn't it? There's this yearning. This desire to be free from people that attack us.

It's really a yearning to be protected. We yearn that God would hear us and we yearn that God would know us and know that we're not a fake and we yearn that God would love us and treat us as the apple of his eye and he'd spread his wings over us and we yearn that we would be protected and that our family would be protected.

And so it's expected, isn't it? When we move to verse 13 and 14 we move to the next yearning and yearning number five is a yearning for vengeance. Verse 13 Arise, O Lord.

Confront him. Subdue him. Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword. From men by your hand, O Lord. From men of the world whose portion is in this life.

You fill their womb with treasure. They are satisfied with children and they leave their abundance to their infants. It's a yearning for vengeance. It sounds so out of place. Doesn't it? We love the apple of the eye, the shadow of the wings but vengeance?

[17:25] And we think, oh it's an Old Testament word. This is Old Testament times. We don't live in the Old Testament. And you need to remember this that in the New Testament God does say vengeance is mine says the Lord.

I will repay it. It's not yours. To execute vengeance is not something that you are to go out and achieve but you must remember you must hold on to the fact there is such a thing as the Lord's vengeance.

There is a place in God's rule of this world for his glorious justice and God's justice is in his hands and not in yours.

It's not sinful to yearn for that justice. It's not sinful to yearn for that vindication. In fact, you've prayed for it this morning, haven't you? You've prayed, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Your kingdom come. What are you praying for? You're praying that God's kingdom would come and other kingdoms would fall and be seen for what they are. I want you to note very carefully that those who fall under God's judgment they are described in verse 14.

[18:42] And can you notice that the focus of people's lives in verse 14 is the here and now? It's this life. The focus of the things in this life and this world and their children and what they're going to leave to their children.

The men of this world, that's where their portion is. They're all about this life and what they'll leave behind in this life. But where's your portion? Is it just this life?

You fill their womb with treasure. They're rich kids. They're satisfied with children and they leave their abundance to infants. Are you satisfied with children for those of us who have them?

Or is there just possibly something more to life than children? People say sometimes to me, particularly at the rugby club, well family is everything.

Everything. Is it everything? It's important. It's a wonderful gift from God, isn't it? Is there more to life than family?

[20:01] He says, doesn't he, they leave their abundance to their infants. And you may be sitting here this morning and you think, well I've not got very much to leave at all. But the abundance that we have in Jesus Christ as his people trusting in him is a much greater treasure to give to our children than all the riches of this world.

Can you see he's describing them but clearly he's not living in the same way that they live. And so as Christians how do we live?

Focusing not on this life and all that we can achieve in this life and all that we can leave behind to our children. know our gaze is fixed higher. Where is our gaze and here's the sixth yearning?

Verse 15. It's what they've been doing. This is how they've been living. But as for me, verse 15.

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness. When I awake I shall be satisfied with your likeness. And so people who don't know the Lord Jesus they are satisfied to have children and they

are satisfied to have stuff.

[21 : 21] But the people of God they accept stuff as a good gift from God and they accept children as a good gift from God. But those who know Jesus can you see it? Are yearning to see God.

They are yearning to see God. And that's what he expresses in this sixth yearning. A yearning to see God is a yearning a desire to be like God.

And that alone will satisfy our souls. Nothing else can truly satisfy the human heart. Because the Bible says that when we see him we shall be like him.

the very seeing of the Lord Jesus Christ will change us. And as we see him he will make us perfectly holy and perfectly happy.

And on that day we will be perfectly beautiful because Jesus makes all things beautiful in his time. and on that day when we see him that is the day when he will make us perfectly blessed and perfectly whole and perfectly restored.

[22 : 35] Johnny Erickson Charder the more I read of her the more I absolutely love her. And in her writings she points to this over and over and over again. She's got this one little saying in one of her books that says suffering hurries our hearts homeward.

Isn't that brilliant? Suffering hurries our hearts homeward. She writes this for those of you who don't know Johnny shame on you she was 17 years old she jumped off a boat injured her back and has been paralyzed all her life.

She's now I think in her 70s. She writes this I sure hope I can bring this wheelchair to heaven now I know that's not theologically correct but I hope to bring it and put it in a little corner of heaven and then in my new perfect glorified body standing on grateful glorified legs I'll stand next to my savior holding his nail pierced hands.

I'll say thank you Jesus and he will know I will mean it because he knows me. He'll recognize me from the fellowship we're now sharing in his sufferings.

And I will say Jesus do you see that wheelchair? you were right when you said that in this world we would have trouble because that thing was a lot of trouble but the weaker I was in that thing the harder I leaned on you and the harder I leaned on you the stronger I discovered you to be never would have happened had you not given me the bruising of the blessing of that wheelchair.

[24 : 09] then the real ticker tape parade of praise will begin and all of earth will join in the party and at that point Christ will open up our eyes to the great fountain of joy in his heart for us beyond all that we ever experienced on earth and when we're able to stop laughing and crying the Lord Jesus really will wipe away our tears.

She says this remember she's had no use of her arms and her legs since she was 17 years old I find it so poignant that finally at the point when I do have the use of my arms to wipe away my own tears I won't have to because God will.

We shall see God's face and to see God's face when we awake is really Easter Sunday morning all over again isn't it? It's resurrection morning.

To see God's face and live to see God's face and not be struck down by his holiness that is God's mercy and when we see him we shall be like him.

Look at verse 15 and I want to commend that verse for your gravestone. It's a great verse isn't it?

[25 : 26] For a gravestone it's a great verse for those of you this morning who grieve those who are in Christ. Can you see it? when I awake I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

You die in Christ you behold his face. When I awake I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

The Christian life is a life of yearning. Let's pray. Let's pray.