A prayer of David

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Principal A.C. Boyd

[0:00] We turn again to our reading in the Old Testament Scriptures in the Book of Psalms, in the 17th Psalm. And tonight we don't wish to look at any one verse in particular in the psalm, but to look at the psalm as a whole.

To look together at this psalm which has the simple title, A Prayer of David.
It was obviously a prayer prayed in a day of great distress, in a time when he was being persecuted by his enemies. No doubt there is more than one experience in the life of David as we read of it in the historical books in the Old Testament.
More than one experience that could be seen as the background to the psalm. But more likely than not, it comes from that period in David's life when he was being bitterly pursued by Saul.
And at a time when Saul's unreasonable, ungodly rage against David was expressing itself at its keenest.
[1:21] And when David also, as we read in the first book of Samuel chapter 23, was experiencing the treachery of other men.

For example, the inhabitants of the city of Keilah whom David had delivered and who in recompense for that were ready to hand him over to the hands of Saul.
It is a prayer that issued from an experience of persecution, of great difficulty.
It is good for us to look together at David's prayer. For we are always needing to learn how to pray. Like the disciples who came to Christ saying, Lord, teach us to pray.
We need to be taught again and again about prayer and how to pray. And Christ who gave to the disciples on that occasion these words that have become so familiar to us and that we speak of as the Lord's Prayer.
[2:34] Gave us these words not to suggest that these wonderful prayers that we have in the Old Testament are irrelevant.

For Christ himself would direct us back to this kind of prayer. And he would teach us from it.
The Spirit, his own Spirit, which inspired this prayer and caused it to be recorded in the Scriptures.
It is the Spirit that we should seek now to teach us from these very words.
We would need to learn about prayer. As we look at this prayer together tonight, let us think a little first of the man who prays.
And then let us think more particularly about the substance of his prayer. And then let us think about the outcome of this exercise of prayer.
[3:37] When we think about the man who hears praise, we're thinking about him not so much as we could find out about him in the whole history of David and the whole record of his life as we have it elsewhere in Scripture.

But we're thinking about him as we're thinking about him as we're thinking about him as we're thinking of him particularly as he presents himself right at the very beginning of the prayer, at the beginning of the psalm.
And what we see there is the picture of one who is protesting his own innocence. This becomes so obvious when we take time to read the prayer carefully.
It's not something we dare overlook. It's something that may raise questions in our mind, but it's good that these questions be raised and faced and that we seek a scriptural answer to them.
For David does here protest his innocence. Hear the right, O Lord. Give ear unto my prayer that goeth not out of feigned lips.
[5:01] Let my sentence come forth from thy presence. Let thine eyes behold the things that are equal or just. Then he goes on, thou hast proved mine heart.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Thou hast visited me in the night. Thou hast tried me and shall find nothing. I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. Concerning the works of men by the words of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.
Such protestations of innocence could easily offend us. It would be easy enough for us to say, well, is this not a self-righteous man?
Is there not something terribly unbecoming for a man, a mere man, a sinner, to present himself before the holy God like this, protesting his own innocence?
Well, we must listen to David as he speaks and put these words in their context.
[6:16] David isn't here changing his estimate of himself from that estimate that he had when in other sands we find him pouring out his heart in confession of sin, acknowledging who could stand, O Lord, if thou shouldst mark iniquity.

David isn't saying here that he has no sin, that there's no fault in him at all. He is speaking in the context of the situation in which he finds himself.
And he finds himself unjustly treated by men. He has been cruelly, wickedly, unjustly persecuted in this particular set of circumstances.
David could stand before God and say, with regard to Saul, there is no malice in my heart toward him.
And I find myself in my present circumstances not because I've rebelled against God. There was a contrast in David's conduct and the conduct of Saul at this time.
[7:50] Saul was in rebellion against God. Saul's heart was evilly disposed, not just against David, but against God himself.

And in that situation, David could protest his innocence. His attitude to his enemy was the kind of attitude that Christ himself prescribes for us in his word when he says, love your enemy.
David had no malice towards Saul. He was being unjustly treated.
And he knew that he could come to the God of justice and pour out his heart confidently before him.
He is not being self-righteous. He is not suggesting that there's no sin in him. But he is saying that there is nothing feigned in the way he prays to God.
[9:09] And when we listen to David speak like that, he is a model for us. How good it is for us to search our own hearts before we come to God.

How good for us to make sure that the lips that are expressing the words of prayer to God are not feigned.
Remember how Jesus himself elsewhere speaking about prayer and about the whole approach to God in worship told us to examine our own lives.
To look at ourselves and to see if there was any wrong attitude towards our brother. To see if anyone had anything against us.
And to put it right first and then come to God. David, as we hear him speak in this prayer, is not a self-righteous man.
[10:19] He's not the opposite of the Christian whom Jesus presents to us in the New Testament. but a man who has been taught by that same spirit.

That is the inspiration of the teaching of all Scripture. And there's this too that when David speaks of his own righteousness, when David speaks about his expectation of being heard, even his right to be heard, he's speaking as one who is coming trusting God.
Here again he stands in contrast to those enemies who are persecuting him. They are in rebellion against God. They've no trust in God.
But David comes and all his hope and his confidence is in God. The righteousness that he claims is, after all, the righteousness of faith.
David here is no different from Abraham who believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.
[11:43] The doctrine of justification by faith. The doctrine of righteousness by faith is most clearly, most perfectly revealed in the New Testament.

But it's not absent from the Old Testament. Indeed, when the apostle Paul expounds the doctrine of justification by faith, of righteousness by faith, he is pointing us back again and again to the Old Testament.
Abraham is the father of the faithful. Paul makes it so clear in the epistle to the Galatians. Those who are of faith are the children of Abraham.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And we're reminded in the New Testament that the just shall live by faith. But that New Testament teaching is just the quotation of the Old Testament prophet.
And here, this man who protests his innocence, who speaks of his hope, even his right to be heard by God, God, is the man who comes to God in faith.
[13:04] And without faith, it is impossible to please God. And James in the New Testament teaches us about the place of faith in prayer.

That him that comes, come in faith, to be heard by God. So here we see a good man.
The good man who is suffering. Suffering at the hands of wicked men. And he comes to God and in faith he commits himself to God.
He knows the need for a clean heart. when he protests his own innocence. You see, we see it in its context. We treat it in its context.
And he's protesting of his own innocence is not the words of a self-righteous man, but rather the words of a man who recognizes that the God that he is dealing with is the righteous one.
[14:21] He is the holy one. He is the just one. God and we are reminded that that's the God with whom we have to do in prayer.

We must approach him as those who are submitted and committed to his justice, his righteousness, his truth.
We're not to treat God the way the heathen treated their gods as though they were tools in their hands to do for them as they would. But we come to a righteous, a just, and a holy God to be submitted to his will.
If we can't come with a clean heart, we have to come for a clean heart. But when we hear David speak of his own innocence in this particular set of circumstances, when we hear David plead with a righteous God, oh, surely we are reminded of him who, in every circumstance, without any exception, could protest his own innocence.
Surely, as we hear David say, thou hast proved mine heart, and hast visited me, and hast tried me, and shall find nothing. As we hear David saying concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.
[16:17] As we hear David even going on to pray, hold up my goings and thy paths, that my footsteps slip not, surely we are reminded of David's greater son, the one who, in every circumstance, could protest his own innocence, the one who, all his life, could invite God to search him, and who would say, thou hast tried me, and hast found nothing.

The one who, as he pursued the road of obedience, was constantly committing himself to his heavenly father, and whose feet never slipped, and who carried his obedience perfect to the end. as we hear David, David's own words are pointing us beyond himself to his greater son, to the Lord Jesus himself, and he's reminding us of our need to come to the throne of God through him as our mediator.
Lord, there is acceptance through none other. He who taught us to pray is the one who himself is the way it thanks us for those who pray, those who taught his children, those who believe in him to say, our father is the one who alone gives us the right to come and use that title.
God, oh, how good for us, in so many ways it's good for us to listen to David as he prays. He sets for us a model and example.
[18:17] He teaches us about our responsibility to see that men can't hold things against us, that if there are things that we can put right, they should be put right before we come to God, but above all, he points us to his greater son and reminds us of the one who is our great high priest.

But let us think of the substance of David's prayer, and think just very briefly about part of its substance, and think again first of the God to whom he prayed, because that indeed is part of the substance of his prayer, because the names and the titles that David uses as he prays are part of his prayer.
The names and the titles were not just things that were, as it were, stuck on to the prayer. they formed the very substance of the prayer.
For him to pray was to think upon the name of God. It was to meditate upon the name of God. His praying was the fruit of thinking of God's name, and dwelling on God's revelation of himself.
For David to pray was not just to use God's name, but to think upon God. And oh, how full is his vision, his understanding, his concept of the living God to whom he comes as he prays.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[20:16] He prays to him as Lord, he prays to him as God, hear the right, O Lord, I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God.

He knows God as the Lord, as Jehovah, as the God who has entered into covenant with his people, as the God who has given himself and covenant to his people.
And he knows that Lord, Jehovah, as the God who is God over all, not just a limited deity belonging to some group of people, besides whom there might be some greater God who could flaunt his will, but his Jehovah is God over all.
And he knows this God as the hearer of prayer. I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God.
And encouraged by that he goes on, incline thine ear unto me, and hear me. He knows this God as Savior.
[21:54] O show thy marvelous loving kindness, thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against thee.

He knows him as the God who has a wonderful, loving, intimate knowledge of and concern for his people.
He thought upon God. His troubles, his persecutions, his difficulties sent him to God to dwell upon God's revelation of himself, to dwell upon all the infinite fullness of the names of God.
And then he prayed. O God has given us his own word. And in his word he reveals himself.
He reveals himself as God over all. God he reveals himself as the covenant God who enters into covenant and who is the saviour of those who trust in him through the son of his love.
[23:20] He reveals himself as the high and the holy one who inhabits eternity but who makes his dwelling with those who are of a humble and a contrite heart.

We have in the fullness of the Bible an even more complete revelation of God than David had.
Oh let us use it. Let us turn to it. Let us turn to it prayerfully in the face of our sinfulness. Don't let us run away from God.
But let us our very consciousness of our sinfulness let the conviction of sin let God's own work in showing us what we are as fallen creatures turn us again to himself to listen to his own word and to see in himself and in the wonder of his own grace and mercy sin.
The answer the only answer to our sin in its guilt in its power in its condemnation and in the face of all our troubles whatever our perplexities whatever our sorrows let us think on the name of God and thinking on his name and having with David to pray just because David's understanding just because of David's meditating upon the name of God just because of that his praying is so rich it's so full he prays hear me but he doesn't limit his expectation of an answer to what he was able to say himself hear me but as he prays what is
[25:43] God hearing what does God hear from the lips and from the heart of this man who has learned from thinking upon God himself how to pray well he hears great and large petitions this is the man who can pray show thy marvelous loving kindness show you see he's expecting God to act when he's asking God to show he's asking God as he says later to arise to work God shows himself in his activity God's revelation of himself isn't what he does and that's what David's looking for and he's saying show thy marvelous loving kindness and he asks

God to keep him but he asks God to keep him in a wonderful way oh what boldness if it wasn't taught by God it would be arrogance but because it is taught by God it's the prayer of faith keep me as the apple of the eye is not the first time these words are used in scripture of the care that God has for his people it's used a way back speaking of the way God brought his people out of Egypt and there too we have the other part of the petition here of verse 8 hide me under the shadow of thy wings God there speaks of himself as taking his people and sheltering them under his wing oh what wonderful prayer it's good to take time with this prayer and look at the extent the depth the breadth the height of the content of David's petition and it's the man who prays to God like this it's the man who's been able to hold upon
God like this who as he prays can face up in a new way to the reality of his problems his dangers his difficulties the malice and the power and the hatred of his enemies for you see it is as David goes on praying that he speaks about what he's up against it's as he goes on praying that he he not only looks to God but because he's looked to God he's able to face his enemies in the face he goes on in the rest of the prayer and we're still thinking of the substance of his prayer and he speaks about his enemies with their mouth they speak proudly they have compassed us in our steps like as

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

a lying greedy of his prey and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places you see to look to God to dwell upon God enabled him to think about his enemies he doesn't see them any less wicked he doesn't see them any less powerful he doesn't see them any less malicious but he sees them in their place he sees them in the light of God he's got a real view of them now he can dare to think of them to see them exposed for all that they are and oh there's so much for us to learn here oh when we think of our own sin when we think of our need as guilty sinners as we've said already don't let us run away from
God let us listen to God's law yes and be convicted by God's law of our sinfulness but don't let us imagine that it's just under God's law that we're going to be convicted of the sinfulness of our sin that we're going to see our sin for what it is it has come to Calvary it has looked at Jesus it has asked God by his spirit to tell us the truth about Jesus who he is the wonder of the incarnation it has asked God to take us to Calvary and see the awful transaction that was being wrought out there and there see the enormity of our sin there it set forth for what it is in all its ugliness and all its hatefulness and in all the condemnation that it deserves but there also we see
God's own answer to it I think we understand the experience of the apostle Paul when we understand that it was when he was brought face to face with the reality and the truth of the gospel that he was brought face to face with the reality of his own sin and in the light of the one he could come to acknowledge the truth of the other and so with all our problems it's good for us to recognize them and to be driven by them to God that when we've spent time in the presence of our God in prayer and meditation we can go back and look at our problems in a new way not covering them up not pretending they're not there but facing them in the light of the reality of our
[33:37] God and so we come to the very last verse of this sound which is the outcome of this exercise of prayer David has thought again of his enemies and he has come to terms with the fact that perhaps even in God's will they might in a way triumph over him they might have their own way God may go on and might give them their portion in this life because that's all that they're looking for all their hope all their expectation is in material things they're the very kind of people that Paul himself speaks of in the epistle to the Philippians when he talks about those whose God is their belly whose glory is in their shame who mind earthy things the psalmist doesn't find any reason to envy them as the outcome of his prayer and his meditation he can say as for me

I will behold thy face in righteousness I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness what a wonderful contentment what a wonderful hope I shall behold thy face in righteousness these words could be interpreted as the hope that yet in this world the psalmist would see God's face shining through the darkness but I think they point further ahead this man whom we've seen as being enabled to pray the prayer of faith is now carried on by that faith to a more wonderful hope a hope that is made so clear to the believer in the new testament I will behold thy face in righteousness I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness the psalmist is saying so much here
I will behold thy face in righteousness he's thinking of a beholding of God's face in which he will be in harmony with the God whom he sees he says I'll be satisfied it's not just that I'll well I'll accept it I'll make do with it but I'll be satisfied I'll be filled to overflowing when I awake what will fill him to overflowing it's the vision of God it's the sight of God himself God the God whom he has learned in this life to meditate upon the God whom he has learned to trust I'll be satisfied I'll be filled with thy likeness his faith the faith that was given by the spirit was carrying him forward with a hope that was only to be more fully revealed in the
New Testament it's the hope that we have if we're in Christ it's the hope that John speaks of so wonderfully when he says now are we the children of God and it does not appear yet appear what we shall be but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him yes he'll be satisfied with the vision of God and he'll be able to abide in that presence because Christ's own work shall have reached its perfect fulfillment and when we see him we shall be like him oh how blessed even the troubles and the difficulties that sent the psalmist to pray and to meditate upon God and to seek out God who had revealed himself in his own word how blessed the troubles that sent him to such praying to such meditation which had such an outcome the laying hold upon this hope that when I awake I shall be satisfied with his likeness oh may our own sin may all our perplexities and our problems send us to God to know him to find him in Christ and in Christ to lay hold upon this hope as our hope Amen let us pray
[39:36] O Lord our God blessed was thine own word grant O Lord that what we speak with our lips and hear with our ears that is truly in accordance with thy revelation of thyself may be blessed

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

to us that these words may never rise up in the end to condemn us because we've spoken them or we've heard them without a true faith but may they be now life to our souls bringing us into fellowship with thee in whom there is eternal life through Jesus Christ thy Son Amen

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host