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Psalm 17

Introduction – Confidence is a misunderstood word; it really means that coming out of faith, one is putting their trust in something or someone. This Psalm is a prayer (first one noted as such in the title) and it is a prayer of confidence. This confidence directs the psalm-singer to pray with boldness which, without a proper understanding of the gospel, can look like arrogance. But it is not. The psalm-singer teaches us to bring our enemies before God, expecting that we will have enemies. The great Psalm-singer told us that we should expect to be mistreated (Matt 10:25, John 15:20). Here we learn what to do about it.

Request with Confidence (vv1-2) – The repetition of the psalm-singer is marked, set out at the beginning. Spurgeon says it is like the repeated blow of a hammer hitting the same nail on the head to fix it more effectually. In verse 2 he requests vindication, which means he's been wronged, mistreated, or persecuted. His enemy appears to have the upper hand, but with confidence the psalm-singer knows that he is upright and God will certainly hear him and respond. He lays out three reasons in prayer and in song for this; singing to God, to himself, and for others to learn and apply as well.

Reason #1: The One Offering the Prayer is Blameless (vv3-5) – Whatever the accusations are, the psalm-singer cries out that he is blameless, reminding God that he has revealed everything to God in regards to his actions, his intentions, and even his words when no one else was around (“...visited me in the night...”). We are Calvinists and stand in the grand tradition of Total Depravity, so how can we understand David? We know that if God were to count iniquities, none of us could stand. But David is referring to the charges brought against him – he is innocent. He is referring to his overall attitude before men – he is blameless. He is referring to his stand before God – he has kept his vows. But this is no patting of the back; he knows this is all by grace through faith. And he knows it will be grace alone that will keep him like that – “uphold my steps in your paths, that my footsteps may not slip” (v5).

Consideration #1: Do you have the righteousness of Another to claim before God? If not, this prayer is foolish to pray. Is there anything that you need to confess before coming before Him with your requests? If we are right before God in Jesus Christ, then He will hear our prayers, which is the positive side of the warnings found in Isaiah 59:1-2 and 1 Pet 3:7. While we believe that we are all sinners, there is a way to be considered blameless like our brother Job.

Reason #2: The One Hearing the Prayer is Our Sovereign Friend (vv6-9) – The second reason builds from the first. We are blameless in Jesus Christ because of God's *lovingkindness* (v7) which is His *hesed*, the love that brought and keeps us in covenant with our Father. We are to pray that God would manifest that lovingkindness by His right hand, His hand of strength and battle, the hand that draws His sword. That lovingkindness is jealous for His people, and the psalm-singer draws on two vivid illustrations in his prayer. Harming the psalm-singer is like trying to poke God's eye. The protection God provides is like that of a strong, courageous mother bird protecting her young under her wings. *Hesed* manifests itself in loyal devotion over us because we are united to God in covenant.

Consideration #2 – Understanding our relationship with God *in covenant* bolsters our confidence and humbles us as well to rely upon Him alone. We are righteous and in the right only because of God's kindness and grace. We can seek protection, care and deliverance, not because of anything we deserve, but because of His promises, His grace, and His strong arm. This all comes to us because God has said, “You shall be my people, and I will be Your God.”

Reason #3: There are Real Enemies of God and His People (vv10-12) – The modern church doesn't want to think of having enemies, or of God having enemies. Rather we are taught that everyone is a friend of God, everyone is striving after the same thing really, and everyone is good deep down in their heart. This is a false-gospel that blurs the antithesis which has existed since the Garden. We are to learn to sing about and against our enemies. And the psalm-singer knows the character of his enemies; they have closed up, fat hearts (v10), they speak proud words (v10), and they are tracing their prey like a hunter (v11), ravenous to destroy (v12). They are like their father, the devil (1 Pet 5:8).

Consideration #3 – We must not be surprised when we are persecuted (1 Pet 4:12-13) and when we are, we must remember that we have not resisted to bloodshed (Heb12:4). We must understand and expect the antithesis as the church has throughout her history. We must not be proud in our insistence before God that we are right, but having examined ourselves, we must insist. We must not keep our light under a bushel nor our city off the hill. The fact that we have a hard time acknowledging or identifying our enemies may mean that we are keeping our salt in the shaker, our lights hidden. There is a friendship with the world that is enmity with God (James 4:4-5). Some of us need to wake up and separate ourselves from the lusts of the world; we must consider ourselves veterans of constant warfare (Rom 13:11-14).

Arise, Mighty Warrior (v13) – The psalm-singer calls on God as a mighty warrior, with a sword in His right hand. This is not a call for Christians to use physical violence; it is a call for God to us any righteous means of His own. When Jesus came in judgment in John's

vision, He came with a two-edged sword coming out of His mouth (Rev 1:16). While this certainly is a metaphor of the Word of God, the Revelation is a prophecy of the real, physical violence brought down upon Jerusalem in her rebellion.

Confidence in the Antithesis (vv14-15) – This confidence produces a clear eye with regard to the final end of all rebellion against God and His people. They, like the prodigal, get their belly filled now for a time. They are not content to wait or humble themselves and submit to God's ways, God's time. They have treasure, but no treasure in heaven – it is all left behind. In stark contrast, we know the final end of all of the troubles and trials of the people of God. The psalm-singer knows that he will behold God in righteousness and share in that righteousness. The satisfaction of that righteousness and God's vindication will be complete and deep on that day when he awakes to find himself conformed to the image of God (1 John 3:2-3).

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