

Savior, Savior, Hear My Humble Cry

Psalm 17 (KJV)

1 Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips. **2** Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal. **3** Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. **4** Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer. **5** Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not. **6** I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech. **7** Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them. **8** Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings, **9** From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. **10** They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. **11** They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; **12** Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places. **13** Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: **14** From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. **15** As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

The Old Song

I would hope that all of us have at least heard if not sung one of the old classics of bygone years. It was a song that was frequently sung by those who were under some of the greatest burdens and sorrows of life. In fact, it was not just a song; it was something of an anthem for the weary and pressured.

Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior

Verse 1: Pass me not, O gentle Savior,
hear my humble cry; while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.

Verse 2: Let me at thy throne of mercy find a sweet relief,
kneeling there in deep contrition; help my unbelief.

Verse 3: Trusting only in thy merit,
would I seek thy face; heal my wounded, broken spirit, save me by thy grace.

Verse 4: Thou the spring of all my comfort, more than life to me,
Whom have I on earth beside thee? Whom in heaven but thee?

This psalm has the same tone of voice that this song has.

Kinds of Psalms

Anyone who reads the Psalms finds them to be a very majestic group of songs that can literally help us to experience the voice of God. If the Word of God is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16) then we take in that breath to our souls when we read the Psalms.

Perhaps no other book in the Bible shows the variety of human emotions that a man will feel in his walk-through life. When we can see them as a group of songs, it opens them up to us even more. That is why that serious Bible study is important as a spiritual discipline for saints of God. To think deeply about Scripture is to pull it into your life and let it shape you.

Hymn Psalms—Begin with a call to worship. All through these kinds of psalms it tells us of the reasons that we ought to worship God.

Lament Psalms—They have a tone of distress, weariness, struggle, and pain in them. The psalmists are facing problems or calamities or sometimes it is even the confession of a sin that he speaks that has taken him low. But there is something compelling about the lament psalms; they express a sense of confidence that the Lord will come to their rescue.

Thanksgiving Psalms—They express thanks for a blessing or some crucial need that has been met.

Remembrance Psalms—These look back at a place or an instance when God intervened. They speak to heritage points, they are anniversaries of God's power, and they help us to remember that there are some great things that are in the past also.

Wisdom Psalms—These psalms will take two contrasting ways of life—one to be followed and another to be shunned.

When you read through the Psalms consider the kinds of psalms that you are reading.

Savior, Savior, Hear My Humble Cry

This psalm is far more than a song! As we can see in the superscription, it is a prayer of David. Of the 150 psalms, there are only five of them that are specified as prayers.

Psalm 17—A prayer of David.

Psalm 86—A prayer of David.

Psalm 90—A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Psalm 102—A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.

Psalm 142—A prayer of David when he was in the cave.

Biblical scholars are unclear as to the time that it was written in David's life, in fact some seem to think that this prayer is a conglomerate of the times when David faced some of his greatest enemies. There are others who seem to think that this was simply another occasion when David was feeling the pressure of fleeing from Saul.

This psalm speaks to our greatest need; prayer. It is a heartfelt prayer that is filled with the pressure of the situation that David is in. It shows the greatness of God and it hints at dark attitudes of enemies in spiritual warfare.

“Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan.”

– John Bunyan

Prayer to God is the most powerful rebuttal we can deliver when we are under the attack of godless and cold enemies.

They have callous hearts.

Their words are arrogant.

They have watched him with alert eyes to trap him.

They have tracked David down.

They have surrounded him.

They have thrown him to the ground.

They are like lions hungry for the prey, fierce lions stalking him.

That is the picture that we notice through this Psalm.

When David feels the pressure of their presence, he cannot help but to cry out to the Lord:

Rise up, Lord.

Confront them, Jehovah.

Bring them down, Savior.

Rescue me, Redeemer.

Save me, Kindly Light.

Before we move into the heart of this Psalm, I want to point out three words: Hear, v. 1; Hold, v. 5; and Hide, v. 8. That is the cry that David is pouring out to the Lord in prayer. Hear me! Hold me! Hide me!

A good outline that I will follow with this psalm is one I am borrowing from Steven Lawson’s fine two-volume preaching commentary on the Psalms:

See Me!

Psalm 17:1-2 (KJV)

1 Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips. **2** Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal.

In Psalm 16, David is clear that the danger is at the distance, but in Psalm 17, David is clear that the danger is present and close.

This is a prayer of David, but it goes even beyond that aspect of a prayer. David was reasoning with the Lord. Some might ask how that David is reasoning with the Lord? He does this by asking the Lord to “hear the right” and he tells the Lord that his prayer is not from “feigned lips.”

“Feigned lips” are lips that are not genuine or authentic. He is telling the Lord that his life is not spent in spiritual fakery or hypocrisy.

“Sincerity is an indispensable factor in prayer. Lips of deceit are detestable to man but much more to God. In something so hallowed as prayer, hypocrisy even in the remotest degree is fatal as it is foolish. Hypocritical piety is double iniquity. He who would feign and flatter had better try his craft with a fool like himself, for to deceive the all-seeing One is as impossible as to take the moon into a net, or to lead the sun into a snare. He who would deceive God is himself already most grossly deceived. Our sincerity in prayer has no merit in it, any more than the earnestness of a beggar in the street; but at the same time the Lord has regard to it and will not refuse his ear to an honest and fervent petitioner.”

– Charles Spurgeon

Many of the old preachers from generations past encouraged the saints to reason with the Lord in prayer. Be it far from me to say that God needs a man to argue with Him or even try at self-justification. But there certainly needs to be clarity of our prayer as it enters a conversation with God.

Reasoning with the Lord in prayer will make your praying sharper and more focused. Far too many falls into the trap of praying like this: Lord, bless ‘em and bless ‘em good!

But when we can reason with the Lord in prayer it makes so much more of an impact.

He ends verse 2 with the cry of “see me” in the path of godliness. David is not claiming perfection or perfect innocence. But he is telling the Lord he is not guilty of what his accusers are claiming about him.

Search Me!

Psalm 17:3-5 (KJV)

3 Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.

4 Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.

5 Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.

David shows us some of the conditions that accompany prayer in this section:

Search Me! Prove my heart! Visit me! Try me! Examine me! Test me!

David’s response in prayer is very telling. Nowhere do we see any hint that he is going to take out his own personal vengeance in all of this. That was a challenge for his times and it is a challenge for our times. Our flesh can rise when we are attacked, but we must realize that there are times where we must simply leave things alone. God has a way of bringing necessary justice to the situations of our lives... if not down here then certainly beyond this life there will be a reckoning.

David responds by asking God to undertake the situation on his behalf.

But there is something else that must be pointed out in this segment... David’s cry is for the Lord to examine, to try, to visit, and to test him. So, the Lord does His part, but David also opens another avenue to us with his prayer. It is the pursuit of holiness that we see in this passage.

I purposed my mouth should not transgress. I avoided the path of the destroyer (i.e. I did not seek out a confrontation.). My goings was in your paths of righteousness. My feet have not slipped on the slippery slope of sin.

Hold up my goings so that my feet do not slip! Sometimes the enemies of the soul are not so much external as they are internal. Jude said that the Lord can keep you from falling.

The longer I read this Book and understand it; holiness is found in every angle of it. This is the process of sanctification. Furthermore, I am to pursue it and put these actions into practice in my life.

Don't transgress with your mouth. Don't seek out unnecessary confrontations. Walk in the path of righteous and holiness. Refuse to fall into the trap of temptation and sinful behavior that ruin your witness.

Holiness is so much more than a list of rules or the Articles of Faith. Holiness is having a God-entranced view of this world and then navigating through it in a way that will honor him.

It is important for the life of a praying person to reach for a place where we can live beyond reproach.

Isaiah 59:1-2 (KJV)

1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

This is a powerful passage for all who will approach the Lord in prayer. He is mighty to save, but there are limitations to how He can respond to those who are appealing to Him in prayer.

Open and un-confessed sin is a great prayer barrier. On the other hand, an upright life is a strong support for an appeal to God.

The matter of prayer involves searching. Look well to your praying! One of the important aspects of prayer is found in these verses... Search me! Self-examination is necessary:

Are we being disobedient? Are we doing something that we know is wrong? Are we defying God's Word? Are we neglecting the Lord's Day? Have we been stealing? Have we been committing sexual sins? What of lying or coveting? Are we being selfish? Are we neglecting an important duty like work, paying our bills, or giving to God's work? Is there a wrong we need to make right? Are our priorities in order?

Luke 6:46 (KJV) And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Show Me!

Psalm 17:6-7 (KJV)

6 I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech. **7** Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them.

Show me your loving-kindness! How would the Lord do something like that? God, out of great kindness, has come to the poorest, most illiterate, most obscure, and the guiltiest of our entire race. Just think of how you came into the church!

Some little altar somewhere. Some little church somewhere. Some poor soul met you and shared the gospel with you. Some little revival among the most common people on the earth.

Paul would say it another way:

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (KJV)

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: **27** But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; **28** And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: **29** That no flesh should glory in his presence.

There is a Cross that this love of God is anchored to. It is a love that cost the life of our Lord. But God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.

“But it is wonderful how God deals with us with such a sacred ingenuity of tenderness. He seems to be always thinking of something for our good; while we, on our part, appear to be always testing his love in one way or another. Some fresh want is discovered only to receive a new supply of grace. Some fresh sin breaks out only to be blotted out with the ever-pardoning blood of Jesus. We get into fresh difficulties only to receive fresh aid. The further I go on my way to heaven, the more I do admire the road as I wonder at the goal to which that road shall bring me.” – Charles Spurgeon

That loving-kindness that David was seeking has been extended to us who are believers:

It has pardoned us from our sin. It has delivered us from our trouble. It has brought to us a great confidence and joy. It has called us to a life of service.

He has shown us his great kindness!

Shield Me!

Psalm 17:8-12 (KJV)

8 Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings,
9 From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. **10** They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly.
11 They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; **12** Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.

David’s enemies are described here in a greater detail:

The wicked, the deadly, the callous, the proud, and the lions.

David uses an expression here that is worth digging into. He says they are enclosed in their own fat.

These enemies of David either have eyes that are enclosed with fat so that they can hardly see out of them, or their hearts are so fat that they are stupid and senseless and devoid of the fear of the Lord.

The phrase hints at the fact that they have a vast holding of wealth and a grip of power on the earth that their own pride and vanity has reached a state where they do not fear God or man. These kinds of people are powerful and control the destinies, not just of men, but also of nations.

David has detailed to us that they have it out for him. But his shield is found in verse 8... Keep me!

A child of God is kept in the eye of God and he has a place of protection under the shadow of His wings.

Save Me!

Psalm 17:13-14 (KJV)

13 Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: **14** From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.

The degree of terror experienced by the psalmist is evident in verses 8-12, but now he is calling for them to be exterminated from the earth. The sword of the Lord is called upon. But it is an interesting sword that David is expressing confidence in.

David is literally requesting for the Lord to use the wicked men, his enemies, to become a sword that the Lord will use to devour each other. The Lord has ways of pitting one enemy against another and letting the righteous escape.

The Lord does this kind of thing all through His Holy Book:

Babylon is used as a hammer of the Lord to bruise the nations. Assyria is used as a rod to scourge the children of Israel.

Satan did service to God by afflicting Job, sifting Peter, buffeting Paul, and executing Judas.

These will have their end when God finally gets finished... You can put your trust and confidence in God that ISIS, Russia, Syria, Iran, and the radical jihadists are never going to have the last say... They are simply swords in the hands of each other that do with the will of God for His cause.

The psalmist does not just stop with the sword, but he wants them to have their stomachs filled.

Paul may have been alluding to this when he wrote, “by thy hard and impenitent heart” (Rom. 2:5, cf. Job 20:26; Psalm 83:4).

From the Life Application Study Bible on Psalm 17:13-15: We deceive ourselves when we measure our happiness or contentment with the amount of wealth and possessions that we have. When we put riches at the top of our value system their power, pleasure, and security overshadow the eternal relationship that we have with God. We think we will be happy or content only when we get riches, but we discover that they don't satisfy and they only fade away. The true measurement is found in the love of God and doing His will.

Satisfy Me!

Psalm 17:15 (KJV) As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

In this psalm, there are two awakenings. In verse 3, David wrote that the Lord had visited him during the night. When the Lord awakens us during our nights of trouble, He brings a comforting peace to the mind and the soul.

But there is another awakening that David is looking forward to. He is speaking of awakening to a new life, a body of immortality, which will have the very likeness of God. In life and death, God is all to us.

How We Are to Look At This Prayer

The last verse of this psalm causes us to make a comparison with two other psalms.

Psalm 18:30... As for God, his way is perfect... No matter what happens in our lives; sickness, financial calamity, trouble, family problems; God does not make mistakes, His way is perfect.

Psalm 103:15... As for man, his days are like grass... Man, David says, I have learned not to expect too much out of him.

Psalm 17:15... As for me, when I awake in the resurrection, I will be able to see the glory of the Lord!

That is how we are supposed to look at this life:

God makes no mistakes. Mankind is not very dependable. As for each of us, we must know that our hope lies beyond all the distress of life that we have experienced here.

Savior, Savior... Hear my humble cry!