

Psalm 17

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 17 January 2011 08:47

In this Psalm we see the faith of David. We also see imprecatory prayer, where God is asked to obliterate enemies. Modern Christians hate this kind of prayer and try to avoid it. Or, to be precise, they hate it in public but think it in private!

It is like those Christians who say we must not judge. It is a nonsense, because EVERYONE judges. Usually, they pretend not to when talking with their peers, but they mull over plenty of judgment in their heads and hearts. It is inevitable, unless a person is literally brain-dead or unbalanced. We all make judgments every moment of the day! Of course, we may not be *judgmental*, which is a different thing.

We also see David saying he is right... another thing modern Christians dislike saying. It is a very odd situation, where we have an Almighty God Whose word is always right – but when we act according to that word, we will not say we are right! It is unreal and debilitating. If God is right, and we repeat what He says, then WE must also be right. Logical! To say otherwise is just petty pretence.

David invites God to search his heart. How many of us dare ask God to do that? David could openly say this to God because he was a true man of God, pure and holy, godly in all his words and ways. The fact of sin does not alter that. In a saved person occasional sins do not mean he or she is imperfect, or evil, or unholy. Sin is just a temporary hiccup, not a permanent illness!

We must always be in a position to invite God to look into our hearts. He looks anyway! We cannot hide anything from Him. He knows when we are genuine, and when we do things for the eyes of our peers, just to look good. When we are genuine, and live righteously, He will come immediately to our side when we are in trouble. This He does because it is ordained in eternity. Obedience is the key.

David saw testing as an honour, used by God to purify and strengthen us. Many see trials as awful events given as a punishment, whereas God gives them as a gift, for our wellbeing. How foolish we all are! How lazy, in wanting to be perfect without a perfecting process; in wanting holiness without living holy lives; in wanting everything from God without obedience. It will never happen!

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Verses 1-3

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

Many Christians today have a feigned sense of their own selves. They refuse to say they are 'perfect' when God says we must be; they have a weird anxiety about putting the word 'I' before anything, because, they say, it shows a lack of humility; they will not speak to God as David does – saying we are right, because it shows arrogance... What a mixed-up, ignorant, miserable lot we are!

It is time Christians were more honest. Instead of pretending they should not say "I am right" when they ARE right. Why deny it, when God already knows and so does the Christian? Many years ago, when I was in a personal predicament concerning hateful Christians though I was arguing scripturally, I threw my arms into the air one day, and pleaded with God to show me if I was right or not, because my enemies were so adamant and pressing. The reply was instant – whether it was an actual voice or in my head, I cannot remember – "You KNOW you are right." The response was quiet and authoritative, unexpected, but it stopped my anxiety and self-reproach, and I then stood firm. NEVER say you are wrong, when you speak biblically.

As believers we are meant to be authoritative in Christ, not lambs begging to be slaughtered! And as believers we are perfect – God says so; we must work at it with humble hearts. As for putting 'I' before a statement, how else can we refer to what we say? "Mr Williams said that Barry Napier is right"? No 'I' there! Placing the word 'I' in a statement merely identifies who says something; it does not necessarily mean we are proud or arrogant. David was the least proud

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person I have come across.

“Hear the right, O LORD”. More correctly, David is asking God to listen to justice and righteousness – which, of course, He always does. So, he is saying “Hear me because what I say is righteous and just”. If what we think, say, and do, is in the will of God (usually defined by scripture), then we are right. Simple as that. We cannot be wrong if we reflect or repeat what God says in His word.

David begs that God will be attentive to his plea, and do something about it; his “cry” or *rinnah*, being an earnest entreaty. He repeats a similar entreaty with “give ear unto my prayer”. Then he assures God (Who already knows), that what he says does not come “out of feigned lips”... what he was saying was not *mirmah*, or deceit.

It is a sad fact that most prayers are *mirmah*, because the Christian does not really mean what he says. He will usually repeat the same old phrases, without them coming from a heart brimming-over with truth or real meaning. How many ‘prayers’ in a prayer meeting are genuine? I would say very few, because prayer meetings are not sanctioned by God, except for those very, very rare occasions when everyone is brought together for a specific serious reason, urgent and given by God. There are also prayers that try to gloss over sin. God knows our hearts! God knew David’s words were genuine, and David reiterated it.

In my work on prayer meetings and prayer, I have said that genuine prayer is prayer that first comes from God into our spirits, and which we then repeat. I have said that only those prayers, from God and to God, are valid. Of course, this receives many retorts... but it does not matter, because I am right! The next verse confirms it...

“Let my sentence come forth from thy presence.” This is highly pertinent to the subject of genuine prayer. David’s “sentence” or *mishpat*, refers to God’s ‘sentence’, not David’s. It is God’s judgment, or justice, or decision. David merely repeats what firstly comes from God. This is underlined by the words “come forth from”. They come forth from “thy presence”, in Heaven.

David, then, KNOWS he is right, because he has asked God to show him what to say and do. This is the basis of all genuine prayer. (Many pastors are ‘professional’ pray-ers, and so are those ‘prayer warriors’ who love to fill a prayer meeting with their own voices, gushing-over with

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the usual formula, saying everything and yet meaning nothing. It is relatively easy to have a list of usual phrases in the mind – they sound good in public, but God does not listen to them!)

David relies totally on God's judgment: "let thine eyes behold the things that are equal." God's 'eyes' are a reference to His purity and all-knowing. God does not look upon evil, treachery or deceit. So, if God responds to David it is to His own Heavenly words (from His 'ayin or presence), firstly sent to David to speak. David asks God to tell him what He perceives to be "equal", meysnar: what is upright and equal or right. The root, yashar, is the opposite to sin – to go straight, be lawful.

David is here saying two things: that what he is pleading before God is just and right, without sin, and, God knows it, whether it is in David or others. God always knows when we think, act or speak truth. Many Christians foolishly and ignorantly try to deceive God with convoluted 'reasons' why they want to do or say something, or why they act in a sinful way. Far better to be blunt – because God is! He will shut His ears to such stupidity, and will only listen and act when we repent.

But, David is assured he is speaking only truth: "Thou hast proved my heart". God tested David and found him holy; his innermost being is godly. God has visited him in the night – when he is not awake and able to deceive, so unable to twist what he really means. God has tried him and not found him wanting. God "shalt find nothing". Can we say that with confidence about ourselves? If not – why not?

"I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress", said David. The reason he did not sin or try to deceive God was a matter of self-discipline. He 'purposed' to be upright, zamam – considered and fixed his thoughts on being holy. Do you do this? Do you deliberately tell yourself to be holy and not to lie or deceive? Do you daily train your mind to always be upright and just? Do you always tell yourself to disregard the many temptations to sin? When a temptation to sin comes, do you immediately hit it hard with the mallet of scripture and cast it aside? Do you turn your head, eyes and ears away from such temptations? After all, it is what the Holy Spirit wants.

David assures the Lord that his mouth will not sin, because he speaks to his own soul and to the Holy Spirit daily, stopping his soul from accepting the slightest traces of sin. I know many, many Christians who think this is impossible (which is another way of avoiding God and continuing in sin). Does it mean David, or you and I, will never sin just by training ourselves

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spiritually? No. It means that if we fall to temptation and sin, we immediately repent and again turn away from it. Repentance covers much that is wrong, by 'restarting' our spirits with truth and light; it proves that our minds are alerted to truth and wish only to know truth, even though we occasionally fail.

We must remember that our spirits are brand new, holy before God. We are perfect because of Christ. We purpose not to sin, even though we sometimes fail. It is this inner purpose or decision of inner self, guided by the Spirit, that God looks at when assessing us, not our occasional sins. If we sin and repent, He will see us as holy and untainted, because of His Son's sacrifice.

Verses 4-7

1.

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

2.

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

3.

I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech.

4.

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.

David continues his plea by saying that when God looks upon his actions ("the works of men"), He will see that David has kept his life safe from sin and Satan by concentrating his whole life on God: "I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer". This means David was kept pure by observing and obeying "the word of thy lips".

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In this way, he avoided the way of life set before him by the “destroyer”, the violent one, the one who robs. This can mean either his earthly enemies or Satan (who is never called by that name in the Old Testament), or both, for it is Satan who drives both saved and unsaved into sin... the unsaved because they are his prisoners, and the saved because they desire to act wrongly.

David then asks God to support him in his desire to be holy. “Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.” David is asking God to keep him fully alert to temptation... most Christians enjoy their sins, so make no effort to get out of them again. They have not fixed their hearts on God and so are easily tempted. But, when we determine to be holy and do everything necessary to be that way, God will carry us forward on the right path, so the destroyer, the enemy of our souls, is kept at bay and cannot harm us. Of course, this is all of God, not us.

When we live holy lives we can call upon God anytime and KNOW He will listen. This is because there is no impediment in our lives to prevent it. “I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God.” David is confident God will listen, because he lives as God decrees! So, he can call on God to “incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech.” God WILL listen and respond when we live righteously.

David asks God to “Shew thy marvellous livingkindness”, because this is God’s enduring response to all who love and obey Him. Therefore, David asks that God will continue to show His love for him, evidenced not only in protection from enemies, but also in His presence in his heart, bringing peace and assurance. To “shew” is to make a distinct impression, separate from everything else. And it is “marvellous” – set apart from the usual ways of mankind and wonderful/illustrious. What is especially ‘marvellous’ is God’s “lovingkindness”, checed: His goodness and faithfulness towards David as a righteous man. God is faithful to all who obey, and is chacad – kind and loving.

If God’s children need him, and are living righteously, they will be upheld and saved by His “right hand” (a symbol of His power) from enemies and troubles, because they put their trust in Him. To ‘trust’ Him is to chacah – flee to Him for protection, to hope and get God’s help. It is a protection open to us all if we obey. This is not Arminianism – it is obedience to what God demands. We are not saved by *our* works, but by *God’s* works. When we do what God demands they are holy works; when we do what we decide to do, it is human works and worthless. Know the difference, and you will know God’s love, freedom in Christ, and peace!

Verses 8-12

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1.

Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings,

2.

From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about.

3.

They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly.

4.

They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth;

5.

Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.

We now see a reference to the way God looks upon David, as the “apple of the eye”. Whatever or whoever is loved by God, is called the “apple of his eye” (Zechariah 2:8). Jacob, too, was favoured by God: “He found him in a desert land... he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye... So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.”

Jacob (like David) was righteous, so God gave him everything: “He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields...” Then follows a long list of benefits given to Jacob. This is the clue to our own lives – God will keep us, when we obey Him and live honourably. (There are times when He will take us along a seemingly barren way, but this is for our testing and eventual cleansing. This is a privilege not a bad thing). Look to God only and be the apple of His eye!

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“Hide me under the shadow of thy wings”. This is a symbol of God’s protection; it is also an indirect reference to Christ, Who was likely the “Spirit of God” in Genesis 1:2, Who “moved upon the face of the waters”, a reference to a mother bird with its wings outstretched. God will completely protect us from dangers and situations if we are faithful to Him.

David had mortal enemies who threatened his very life, they were “wicked” people oppressing him, “deadly enemies” who surrounded him. David was one of the most courageous and fearless men to have lived, yet even he pleaded for God’s mercy and help. He knew that unless he was faithful and God was with him, he would be destroyed instantly.

His enemies were “inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly.” These enemies thought themselves to be something; they were rich (fat) and had great resources, and, like the many kings that come and go, they thought this would be their protection. Thus, they are arrogant and rely on their own means. Such is the enemies’ pride. It is also, sadly, the pride of many Christians, who think they can live without God, or without being holy. (Look beyond the neatly pressed suits and ties, the lovely dresses and handbags, and the perpetual evangelical smiles!)

These enemies, says David, have completely surrounded him and his people. The enemies have “set their eyes bowing down to the earth”, or in modern language, they want to grab all the land they can; “bowing down” means to stretch out, extend. Ever known a time when you were surrounded on all sides by enemies or troubles, and cannot see a way out? Then read the Red Sea miracle again and remember – God is the Master of tough situations! In essence, the situation is irrelevant to God, for He can remove the obstacle with a word, something He predetermined before time began! Look up to God, not down to the earth like your enemies.

In my time (and I suspect in the future) I have been literally stopped from progressing anywhere by my enemies or situation. But, at the exact moment of what I *thought* would be my demise, God caused the situation or enemy to evaporate before my eyes, with a remarkable and amazing response. You see, we can be amazed, shocked, angry, saddened, frightened... but it does not make any difference to God’s plans; He will do what He does anyway.

Grown lions stalk their prey and young lions copy, hiding their presence so as to surprise their victim. Lions tear you apart and the whole pride eat you. That is what these enemies were like. It is what our enemies are like today. I fear that many Christians cannot see the enemies at their door. They do not realise what is going on, and think all is well, even though watchmen are

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shouting warnings from the walls of the city. It is a mark of spiritual decline.

Modern Christians in the West are comfortable in their relative wealth and position, so they ignore the truth and the reality of modern life. But, Christians in Africa and other Islamic countries know what to fear and avoid, they know that death and danger lurk, like lions, ready to destroy them. Oh that western Christians could taste of the very real dangers others face every day! It would do their souls good and might turn them back to Christ!

Verses 13-15

1.

Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword:

2.

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.

3.

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

After observing the reality of his situation, David comes up with the answer. Bear in mind that David only prays what God has already placed upon his heart to pray about. Thus, whatever he says is from God in the first place, even if modern Christians hate the idea of praying for the downfall of an enemy.

“Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down”! The word “arise”, *quwm*, can be used to refer to a hostile rise, as well as powerful, or to stand up on the side of the faithful. In many texts God shows Himself to be hostile towards enemies of the soul and the body, so do not pretend otherwise.

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David asks God to “disappoint” the enemy, qadam, to meet him head-on, to confront him, to go before David, just as the holy cloud and pillar of fire went before the Hebrews. Our God is mighty; He has no equal; when He stands for us, no enemy can win against us. The term also means to fall upon someone with great ferocity. God does these things on our behalf, if we are faithful.

God will cast the enemy down, causing him to acknowledge God and to bow before those they wish to harm; to be subdued. In this way, David would be ‘delivered’ or saved from destruction by the *rasha*’ – the wicked who loathe God and His people.

This action by God on our behalf, is his “sword”, chereb: meaning He would lay the enemies to waste by killing or subduing them. (Matthew Henry sees it differently). The root, charab, means to make them desolate, to put them to ruin. How many modern Christians are afraid to ask God to completely obliterate their enemies? Instead, afraid to appear unloving before their peers (who make the same silly mistakes), they ‘pray for’ enemies of their souls and bodies. That is, they pray for their wellbeing. But, why? David did not do that, nor does God.

If people are wicked and they hate us, we may call upon God to remove them, by whatever means He wishes to use, including death and crushing. There may be times when we can pray for an enemy at first, or if God allows us to. But, many enemies are so wicked we may only pray for their downfall.

For example, a modern enemy is the homosexual movement, which hates God and His people with a passion. Its members are truly wicked. Therefore, we must pray for their destruction. That is the general rule, for some of us might be prompted to pray for the salvation and wellbeing of an individual homosexual. But, as God says, homosexuals do what is an abomination and are cast aside by Him, we have no right whatever to pray for the wellbeing of all homosexuals.

The same applies to Islam, though not to all Muslims (the case is different for a number of reasons), which must be prayed against strongly, because Islam hates the true God and His people. Only staying close to God will show us who to pray for, and who to pray against.

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Men are used by God to bring about His bidding, whether they are enemies or friends. ("From men which are thy hand"). The "men of the world" have "their portion in this life". That is, the unsaved can see no farther than what they have in this world. Satan makes very sure of that. So, they fight for what they have and hate those who try to stop them.

These people receive the general benefits God gives to all mankind – sun, rain, seasons, food, and so on. All share in this bounty, yet few praise God for it. These unsaved souls have many children to carry out their greedy and sinful wishes, and hope to leave what they gain to their children's children. I find this a remarkable statement that can apply today to the Islamic movement. It, too, raises many children so that they can overrun every country with Islam. That is, with wickedness.

But, David, conversely, wants only spiritual benefit: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." God only wants holiness and goodness from God. Yes, he was also a very rich king, but this did not really interest him. His heart was set on the Lord and on His presence. Nothing else should matter to a Christian – but, unfortunately, many want earthly things more than this. There is nothing wrong with enjoying what God provides, but everything wrong in desiring these things above our spiritual wellbeing.

David says he wants to be completely filled with God's presence, and with His likeness. When he awakes and when he goes to sleep, he only wants to see God and His holiness. Is this your desire on this earth?

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