

Series FolkSongs of Faith

This Message Living in the Presence of Yahweh

Scripture Psalm 5

There is a general theme in the first five Psalms — the contrast between righteous and wicked people. For example, in Psalm 1 the person who “delights in the law of the LORD” and does not do evil is compared to “a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither, and who prospers in whatever he does.” In contrast, wicked people are “like chaff that the wind blows away.” They will not stand in the judgment of the LORD.”

In Psalm 2 the contrast is between the people who “kiss the Son and take refuge in Him” and those who rebel “against the LORD and His Anointed One.” This latter group think they can throw off the sovereign authority of the LORD and live as they want. These rebellious people are warned to “serve the LORD with fear ... lest He become angry and destroy them.” On the other hand, “those who take refuge in the LORD will be blessed.”

In Psalm 3 David emphasized that the LORD was a shield around him, that he did not need to be afraid or anxious about oppressive circumstances, and that the LORD would deliver him by striking down all his enemies.

In Psalm 4 David described how the LORD responded to the two groups of people. He reacted to those with godly attitudes and behavior in a different way than He responded to people who had foolish and evil thoughts and actions. David wrote that the LORD “sets apart” and preserves “the godly for Himself.”

This same general theme is in Psalm 5. The Psalmist emphasizes the contrast between those who place themselves under the protection of the LORD and those who are rebellious and sinful. Individuals who approach the LORD with humility and reverence will be glad and enjoy the protection of the LORD, while those who are arrogant and rebellious will face the wrath of the LORD.

Read Psalm 5

David desired a life of fellowship with God. At the beginning of each day he brought his concerns and requests to the LORD. He made his requests known to the LORD “in the morning”, and then he lived out his day in expectation of what the LORD would do.

David’s time with the LORD was not ritualistic or superficial. His “words” and his “sighings” implied an intensity of feelings. He was able to articulate some of his requests in normal speech, but there were other times in which the only sounds which came forth were sighings and groanings, which represented deep-set emotional longings and concerns which could not be expressed in mere words.

We don’t know the specific circumstances of David’s life which brought forth such intensity and passion in his prayers. There are no historical events to which we can link this Psalm with certainty. What we can recognize in the poetry is that David was experiencing great personal felt needs, and he was pouring out his heartfelt desires to God.

The phrase, “listen to my cry for help,” can be translated, “Listen to my plea for help.” David was the King of Israel, with wealth and authority and an army of very capable men around him, but he recognized that he did not have the influence and power to deal with the circumstances of his life on his own. Therefore he pleaded for help from “the LORD,” the only One who had the power and authority to respond to his concerns; the only One who was in the position to redeem and deliver.

When the word “LORD” is printed in capital letters in our Bibles, it is the English translation of the Hebrew title “Yahweh.” “Yahweh” was the name by which God declared Himself as the self-existent, self-sufficient, Sovereign over all, the One Who was higher and greater than any of the gods worshipped by the nations. “Yahweh” was the covenant name by which God revealed Himself to Israel and, in a personal way, to David. David referred to “Yahweh,” this great God above all other gods, as his King (*“melek”*), the One who had established His dominion and order in all of heaven and earth, and the One who, in a special way, was identified as the King of Israel. The name “God” is the Hebrew word “Elohim,” which is the general term used for the Creator God.

At the beginning of this Psalm, David declared his allegiance to Yahweh, referring to Him as “my King and my God.” This indicated the personal connection between David and Yahweh. This personalized relationship gave David a certain kind of confidence as he dealt with his day by day difficulties.

There is a picture that I want you to hold in your minds. In the Old Testament times, and also in modern times, it was common practice for kings to occasionally hold public audiences or public forums so that individual citizens who were facing special difficulties could approach the King and appeal for help. The first three verses of Psalm 5 describe such an event. David, the King of Israel, was appearing before his heavenly King to ask Yahweh to “give ear to his words, consider his sighings, and listen to his plea for help.”

David said to Yahweh, “to you I pray.” Of course, prayer to Almighty God is not exactly the same thing as petitioning an earthly king, although the imagery is similar. The citizen would have only one brief opportunity to appear before the earthly king. However, verse 3 implies that it was David’s habit to appear before his King, the LORD, on a daily basis. With the dawn of each new day, David “raised his voice to the LORD” and “laid his requests before the LORD.”

And then David demonstrated his faith in the LORD; he “waited in expectation.” Here we learn an important lesson about prayer and faith. David knew that his problems were beyond his ability to change or solve. He knew he needed Someone more powerful than himself to alter the situation of his life, and so he waited for God to change his circumstances.

Our human tendency in difficult situations is, too often, to “wring our hands,” worry and fret, and to take action according to our own judgment and in our own strength, with the result that we usually make matters worse for ourselves. David, however, articulated his concerns and then he placed himself under the authority and guidance of his heavenly King. His level of confidence in God was so great that, in spite of his desperate circumstances, he was willing to wait until God took action directly, or at least provided clear direction about what action was appropriate for him. David had confidence that Yahweh would give ear to his words, consider his sighings, listen to his cry for help, and respond with answers.

Along with his confidence, David had hope. He “waited in expectation” to learn what the LORD would do. This is exactly the attitude that believers should have. Unfortunately, in contrast to the confidence, hope, and calmness of David, too often we continue to worry and fret about ourselves after we pray. When this happens, we are not manifesting the kind of confidence and hope that God wants us to have.

Jump ahead to verses 11 and 12 for a moment. These verses inform us of the outcome of people who, like David, place their confidence and hope in the LORD. There is gladness and joy for those who take refuge in the LORD. Furthermore, the LORD will bless and surround the righteous with His favor. David understood this, and therefore he was free from anxiety in spite of his concerns, and he could rejoice and relax both spiritually and physically. He experienced the peace and calmness that only the Sovereign LORD of heaven and earth could provide.

In verses 4-6 there were some other important spiritual truths that David understood. He understood that God hates both the sins of people and those who sin against Him. Verses 4 and 5 can be paraphrased this way: “God takes no pleasure in evil; therefore those who are evil cannot dwell with God. Arrogant, boastful people cannot stand in God’s presence because He hates all workers of evil.”

To understand the context of these verses, we must go back to our imagery of the citizen who approaches the earthly king. No earthly king would want or allow criminals and lawbreakers to come into his presence. He would not be inclined to grant favors to such people. Earthly kings had no time or patience for individuals who would not dignify and respect the position and authority of kingship. In the same way, David understood that God would not listen to or consider the petitions of any wicked person. Such a person who would try to come into God’s presence would be subject to rejection and judgment. As verse 6 states: Yahweh “destroys those who tell lies, and abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful people.” Such people are totally detestable to Him.

In contrast to the wicked who would not be able to “stand” or “dwell” in Yahweh’s presence, David had the assurance that Yahweh would permit him to approach the throne and to voice his requests. Verse 7 begins with the words, “But I....” David confidently came into Yahweh’s presence because he loved and appreciated the LORD. Verse 7 explains that He came reverently, bowing down low in humility, giving appropriate respect to the high King of heaven and earth.

David understood that he could not come into Yahweh's presence on the basis of his own virtues, but only because Yahweh was merciful. The Hebrew word for "mercy," when it refers to God's mercy, is often translated "lovingkindness" or "unfailing love." It has a meaning which is much fuller and richer than the word "mercy" usually signifies. In the context of this Psalm, the word "mercy" represented the special "royal love" of our heavenly King which makes it possible for sinners to enter into the presence of the righteous holy sovereign LORD. For David, it was as if Yahweh, the King, extended His scepter toward him, thus indicating acceptance and permission to come into close proximity to the throne. I want to emphasize that David's hope of acceptance by Yahweh was not based on his own righteousness, but entirely on the mercy and love of Yahweh.

Verse 8 highlights the contrast between the attitudes and behaviors of wicked people and those of David. David wanted to be led by Yahweh. He did not want to be like the arrogant people who rejected the ways of the LORD. Notice that David wanted to be led in the ways of righteousness, not just delivered from his troubles. Even in the midst of his difficulties, what David wanted most was wisdom to know the will of God and the ways of righteousness. Normally, most of us, when we pray, are most concerned about relief from our difficulties. However, God is more concerned about how we conduct ourselves and behave while under the pressures of our circumstances. Righteousness is all about godly conduct and behavior. Pressure packed situations are wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth when we seek guidance in righteousness.

Verses 9 and 10 continue the description of people who refuse to seek after God. One of the principal characteristics of evildoers which is brought out in this Psalm concerns their speech: their words cannot be trusted; they speak "falsehood;" their words are "deceitful." Their words cannot be trusted because their hearts are "filled with destruction." The phrase, "their throats are an open grave," is a poetic way of saying, "their words bring death."

As king, David would not tolerate in his presence individuals who were just so untrustworthy, uncooperative, and treacherous. As king he would banish such people from his sight because he had the authority to punish such people for their treachery and disloyalty. Consequently, David, the earthly king, understood the position that Yahweh, the King of heaven and earth, was in. It was necessary for Yahweh to judge and punish those who were unrighteous and rebellious. David knew that God would take correct actions against evil.

At the root of the evildoers' actions was their attitude of rebellion against Yahweh. Their attitudes and behavior on the human level were evidence of their disregard for Yahweh and His established order as the King over all. David knew that God would hold the wicked accountable for their actions. In David's opinion, the wicked could not be allowed to continue to live as if they were the kingdom people of God. They weren't. Or that the behavior of the wicked was condoned by the LORD. It wasn't.

At the same time, David understood the privileges of fellowship with Yahweh. Verses 11 and 12 describe these privileges. David had placed himself under the protection and authority of Yahweh, and he had experienced gladness and joy. He knew that everyone who would take refuge in Yahweh would be glad and would be able to sing for joy. The protection of Yahweh would be spread over those who "loved the name of Yahweh.

This Psalm should be an encouragement to all those who want to live in the presence of the Lord, who place their heartfelt burdens before the Lord, and who pursue the righteousness of the Lord. David knew that the LORD would bless the righteous, and surround them with His favor.

Three key thoughts expressed by David in this Psalm to remember are:

- 1) Pour out your concerns to the Lord (and wait for His action),
- 2) come into His presence (and follow the leading of the Lord), and
- 3) take refuge in the Lord (and enjoy His blessings).

Some Thoughts to Hold On To:

*If we have the correct attitude and relationship with the LORD, we can come into His presence without fear or hesitancy.

*We can present all our concerns and needs to Him.

*The LORD can free us from anxiety and worry, and give us rest.

*We must allow the LORD to lead us in His paths of righteousness, especially in times of crisis.

*The LORD will surround us with protection and favor, even when we are in the midst of trouble. (However, keep in mind that the LORD does not guarantee trouble free living.)