

“Vindication”
Psalm 54
(Preached at Trinity, January 16, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to **Psalm 54** we find another brief psalm that has much to teach us. Even the superscription has much to say.
 - A. First, we find it is a psalm delivered to the chief musician—it is a psalm designed to lead Israel in worship. And it is on Neginoth, meaning it was played on stringed instruments: dulcimer, harp, lute, lyre, psaltery, sackbut.
 - B. Second, **Psalm 54** is designated as a Maschil. It is psalm intended for instruction. Israel was taught by what they sang. The same is true for the church today. Our music must have a function of teaching.
Colossians 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”
 - C. Third, we find it’s a psalm of David.
2. Finally, David uses the superscription to describe the setting for the psalm.
 - A. In **1 Samuel 23** the Philistines were attacking the Jewish border town known as Keilah. David inquires of God if he should attack the Philistines and rescue the citizens of the town and God gave him approval to attack. Instead of gratitude the people of Keilah betrayed David over to Saul.
 - B. When Saul heard that David was in Keilah Saul marched his armies to capture David. David escaped and fled to the desert area of Ziph. In order to foster favor with Saul, the Ziphites betrayed David’s position.
1 Samuel 23:19-21 – “Then Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is David not hiding with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? ²⁰ “Now then, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to do so; and our part *shall be* to surrender him into the king's hand.” ²¹ Saul said, “May you be blessed of the LORD, for you have had compassion on me.”
3. The Ziphites were Israelites; David’s own kinsmen. The people of Keilah were David’s kinsmen. Saul was David’s kinsman. Yet they all hated David and sought his destruction.
4. David felt abandoned and betrayed. He had rescued Keilah and they returned treachery. David fled to Ziph hoping for rest and protection but instead they abandoned him to Saul. How did David respond? Vengeance would have been the natural response but instead David’s response was to turn to God.
5. The division of the psalm is simple.
Verses 1-3 - David makes his plea to God to vindicate him before his enemies.
Verses 4-7 - God comes to David’s defense.

- I. **Verses 1-3** - David makes his plea to God to vindicate him before his enemies.
- A. David's first response was that of crying out to God
1. His response was to pray –
 - V. 1** – “Save me, O God”
 - V. 2** – “Hear my prayer, O God”
 - a. David didn't look beyond God.
 - b. Earlier David declared:
 - Psalms 20:7** – “Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”
 2. The natural tendency when we are wronged is to seek vengeance. The Biblical model is clear.
 - Romans 12:19-20** – “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.”
- B. What did David mean by, “Save me, O God, by thy name”
1. Remember the importance of a name in the OT. A person's name described the essence of his character. The Hebrew word for name is **שֵׁם** {shame} can also be translated “reputation”
 - **Gen. 3:20** – “And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.”
Eve (**חַוְוָה** Chavvah) means “life” or “living”
 - The name Adam (**אָדָם**) means “man” or “mankind”
 - Abram's name was changed to Abraham
Gen. 17:5 – “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.”
Abram means “exalted father”
Abraham means “father of a multitude”
 - Jacob and Esau were named appropriately
Genesis 25:25 – “And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.”
Esau means “hairy”
He became the father of the Edomites. Edom means “red”
Genesis 25:26 – “And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.”
Jacob means “heel holder” or “supplanter”
 2. God's name is the essence of His being
Genesis 4:26 – “And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.”
Proverbs 18:10 – “The name of the LORD *is* a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

3. This is why the Third Commandment means so much more than just using the name of God as a means of cursing – it is an insult to God Himself which God will never allow.
Leviticus 18:21 – “And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through *the fire* to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I *am* the LORD.”
 4. David was calling upon the fullness of God—God in all His power and might, God in His perfect justice, God in His sovereign dominion.
 5. The same is true for those who call upon Christ
Romans 10:13 – “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
- C. David looks to God to vindicate him - “judge me by thy strength.”
^{ESV} “vindicate me by your might.” ^{NAU} “vindicate me by Your power.”
1. Once again David was pleading for God’s justice. David was just in this matter. He sought God in going to war against the Philistines to rescue the citizens of Keilah and they turned on him. He was just in seeking protection from the Ziphites and they turned on him.
 2. David’s cause was just. Notice his chief concern was the glory of God. We are sinful to focus only upon ourselves. They have not ultimately sinned against us but against God.
Psalms 54:3 – “For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them.”
 3. We can also hear the voice of our Savior as He was falsely accused and condemned - **John 15:25** – “They hated me without a cause.”
Our Lord serves as continued encouragement for us:
Hebrews 12:3 – “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”
 4. David is asking God to come to his aid and bring justice. We are not allowed to execute justice ourselves. God’s justice is perfect and often swift.
Romans 12:19-20 – “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.”
 5. Even when we do not see God’s justice coming swiftly we patiently wait upon Him to vindicate us and Himself.

Selah

II. Verses 4-7 - God comes to David’s defense.

- A. David was sure that God was on his side – “Behold, God *is* mine helper”
 1. David’s basis for this was two-fold
David was one of God’s own children – protection is part of our heritage
David’s cause was just
 2. The last part of **Verse 4** is translated differently between KJV & others
KJV – “the Lord *is* with them that uphold my soul.”
NASB – “The Lord is the sustainer of my soul.”

- a. The word for “soul” is נֶפֶשׁ nephesh means “life” which is how the ESV reads
 - b. The KJV reads that God blesses those who preserve David’s life. Apparently reference to the lack of care of David’s enemies.
 - c. The other translations state that God upholds the life of the elect This seems most consistent with the Hebrew and it is also the way the Septuagint reads
 - d. The KJV however is surely consistent with the context
Psalms 54:5 – “He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth.”
 - e. It is true that there are consequences applied to the way people treat God’s elect.
Matthew 18:6 – “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”
Mark 9:41 – “For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.”
 - (1) The parable of the Sheep and Goats imply that the treatment of God’s elect is equal to their treatment of Christ
Matthew 25:40 – “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.”
 - (2) This truth was relayed to Paul
Acts 9:4 – “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”
3. The second half of **Verse 5** changes from a declaration to a petition:
KJV – “cut them off in thy truth.”
NASB – “Destroy them in Your faithfulness.”
- a. David is making a declaration by faith—a declaration that God will reward the evil of his enemies – recompense, justice
 - b. And then he petitions God to carry it out.
 - c. As we’ve seen with other imprecatory psalms while we should pray for our enemies this doesn’t mean we cease to pray for justice.
- B. The final verses of the psalm are expressions of praise for God’s deliverance
1. He offers up praises of thanksgiving
“I will praise thy name, O LORD; for *it is good*.”
 2. The word for praise יָדָה yadah is the same word translated “thanksgiving” which is how the ESV & NASB translate it.
 - a. To praise God is to offer expressions of thanksgiving – they are one and the same. You can’t be thankful to God without praising Him.
 - b. The other Hebrew word for “praise” is הָלַל halal which carries the idea of making a boast.

3. David was expressing great gratitude to God for this is well-pleasing to God. He adds, “for it is good.”
This is God’s expectation for us
1 Thessalonians 5:18 – “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”
 4. Notice David evokes the name of God again as he did in **Verse 1**
Only, in **Verses 1&2** David uses the word Elohim
In **Verse 4** he uses the word Adonai
But here in **Verse 6** David uses the word Yahweh – the great name for the self-existent God which describes Him as all encompassing.
- C. The focus of David’s song of praise and thanksgiving
1. For his great deliverance
Psalms 54:7 – “For he hath delivered me out of all trouble”
 2. For God’s great vindication
KJV “and mine eye hath seen *his desire* upon mine enemies.
NASB “And my eye has looked *with satisfaction* upon my enemies.”
ESV “and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.”
 - a. The idea is that God has brought judgment upon David’s enemies and David saw it as a great victory

Conclusion:

1. We have all had such times of affliction. This Christless world can be a lonely place, yet we are never forsaken. David looked to the ultimate source of his strength; his ultimate Deliverer—“Save me, O God.”
2. This is one of the sweetest prayers. It is the prayer that every human being must be brought to utter. It is a prayer of weakness, a prayer of distress, a prayer of helplessness. But it is a prayer that is surely answered.
Romans 10:13 – “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
3. In Spurgeon’s “Treasury of David,”
“And while the Ziphims of the present hour harass and distress me, and would deliver my soul up into the hand of the enemy: Oh for grace to be looking unto thee, and deriving strength from thee, that I may discover thy gracious hand delivering me out of all my troubles, and making me more than conqueror in thy strength, and in the power of thy might.”
4. May God grant us the grace to cry out to Him—our Lord, our God, our Strength, our Deliverer.