

# Rescue Me

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**Bible Verse:** Psalm 140  
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Well, our text tonight is going to come from Psalm 140 and I'd like to just read that as we begin, and then I'll have some preliminary comments to make before we go into our exposition of the text. I do want to say that I'm confident as I stand before this room in particular, that there are a vast majority of you are people who love peace and you seek to have peaceable relationships and you bring peace to the table whenever you possibly can, and I'm grateful for that, and with that in mind, we turn to Psalm 140 and I'll lead into an expansion of those comments after we read the text. Psalm 140. The inscription reads, "For the choir director, a Psalm of David." Verse 1,

1 Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men  
2 Who devise evil things in their hearts; They continually stir up wars.  
3 They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips. Selah.  
4 Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me from violent men  
Who have purposed to trip up my feet.  
5 The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; They have spread a net by the wayside;  
They have set snares for me. Selah.  
6 I said to the LORD, "You are my God; Give ear, O LORD, to the voice of my supplications."  
7 O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle.  
8 Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; Do not promote his evil device,  
that they not be exalted. Selah.  
9 As for the head of those who surround me, May the mischief of their lips cover them.  
10 May burning coals fall upon them; May they be cast into the fire, Into deep pits  
from which they cannot rise.  
11 May a slanderer not be established in the earth; May evil hunt the violent man speedily."  
12 I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted And justice for the poor.  
13 Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name; The upright will dwell in Your presence.

Now, before we turn to Psalm 140, I just want to make some preliminary comments about just the nature of peace and the Christian life, and Christians who desire peace and yet find conflict to sometimes find them even when they're not looking for it. It is true that one of the marks of true Christians are that they are peacemakers, Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they," and they alone, "shall be called sons of God." And so a true Christian, according to Jesus, is someone who in their heart

loves peace, and we understand that peace and peaceableness is even a fruit of the Holy Spirit, fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so on. And so the concept of peace and having not just a subjective sense of peace but seeking peace in relationships, is a fundamental aspect of being a true Christian. No true Christian loves conflict and loves controversy, and loves fractured relationships. No true Christian is like that because we serve the Prince of Peace, and when God saves us, he puts his peaceful Holy Spirit within us, he gives us an objective peace, a reconciliation with God that yields to a subjective peace in our hearts, and it flows out and spills over into our relationship to the extent that we have any control over it, and I see that manifested by so many of you in your lives and I'm just so very grateful for it, and we start from that fundamental premise. But if you read Scripture carefully, you start to understand that peace is not always within our power to effectuate, we don't always have the ability to impose peace where we would want it because some people will not have peace and that is a reality that I want to spend just a moment to remind you of and to encourage you of by way of introduction to, by way of introduction to Psalm 140.

If you would turn back to Psalm 120 for just a moment, Psalm 120, which was the start of the Songs of Ascents which we looked at, you know, within the past year or so, in Psalm 120 we find the psalmist saying this in verse 6, he says, "Too long has my soul had its dwelling With those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, They are for war." "I want peace," the psalmist says, "but they will not have it. They inflict conflict on me. They inflict conflict on those that they are about." And so we see that theme in the Psalm, certainly in many more places than just Psalm 120, but over in Matthew 10, Matthew 10, we read Jesus giving this balancing thought to us, this consideration that there will not always be peace for his followers on earth, even in their closest relationships. Jesus himself said specifically in Matthew 10:34, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household." Our own household will often be the source of conflict, even when that's not what we desire, and, you know, I know that many of you have experienced that or are even walking through that even today. Understand that Scripture speaks to that, recognizes it, and while none of us, you know, are thoroughly immune from, you know, slipping into the carnal ways of our flesh, Scripture realizes that a believer can be blameless in the midst of those kinds of times. The mere fact that you're experiencing conflict is not necessarily an indication that you are responsible for it, and that's why in Romans 12:18, the Apostle Paul said, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." To the extent that you have anything to do with it, contribute to peace, be a peacemaker, but Scripture recognizes that it may not be possible for you to maintain the peace because some people will not have it. Some people will make false accusations. Some people will slander. Some people will provoke and initiate conflict in an unprovoked manner against the people of God. And so we will face enemies who try to stir up mischief against us, and this Psalm 140 gives us a sense of perspective on how to respond to that with a sense of trust in the Lord.

Now in Psalm 140, which we just read, I want to set the context by reminding you of some some things from the prior two Psalms, and then some things in the Psalms that

follow. The prior two Psalms, 138 and 139, had a spirit of thanksgiving about them, and this was clear from the beginning in Psalm 138 where David opens with the fact, "I will give You thanks with all my heart; I will sing praises to You before the gods." David saying, "I'm opening this Psalm with thanksgiving." His heart is filled with gratitude toward God for who God is and what God has done. And in Psalm 139:14, we read him saying this, "I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well."

And so these, the two Psalms leading up to Psalm 140 were Psalms that had a strong note, a strong theme of thanksgiving wrapped into the very essence of what their message was but even in those Psalms, enemies were lurking in the background. Again, look at Psalm 138:7, the same Psalm where David said, "I will give You thanks," in verse 7, he says, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies." David's gratitude was existing side-by-side with present, immediate, human opposition that was seeking to destroy and undermine him. And in like manner in Psalm 139:19 we read this after David has meditated on the omniscience and the omnipresence and the omnipotence of God and given him thanks because he is fearfully and wonderfully made, we see David side-by-side in the same Psalm, from the same heart, from the same Spirit-inspired direction to his writings, David says, "O that You would slay the wicked, O God; Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against You wickedly, And Your enemies take Your name in vain." And so so while David is giving thanks, at the same time there is this closing circle of opposition coming around him, people that speak wickedly against God, speak wickedly against David, and so the picture of Scripture are these two things existing side-by-side. Even as a godly man is honoring God in his life and and honoring God with with his prayer, here we find enemies breathing down his his neck.

Now as you move and pivot from those two Psalms into Psalms 140 through 143, the threats of the enemies now come front and center. They're not in the background, they are the predominant theme of the Psalms, so that in our Psalm for this evening, we see Psalm 140:1, "Rescue me, O Lord from evil men; Preserve me from violent men." Evil men, violent men, and one of the signs of the moral decay of our present society, and of our present culture, is the terrible reluctance to label men as evil when they show the perversity of their hearts. You know, we've fallen into this, this moral ambiguity and this moral equivalence that is not willing even from Christian pulpits, to call evil men evil and to call wicked men wicked. Scripture does not have those hesitations. Scripture calls a spade a spade, you could say. And so in Psalm 140 the enemies are front and center.

Likewise in Psalm 141, look at verse 8, 9 and 10, Psalm 141:8 through 10. David says, "For my eyes are toward You, O GOD, the Lord; In You I take refuge; do not leave me defenseless. Keep me from the jaws of the trap which they have set for me, And from the snares of those who do iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, While I pass by safely." In Psalm 142:6, David says, "Give heed to my cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, For they are too strong for me. Bring my soul out of prison, So that I may give thanks to Your name; The righteous will surround me, For You will deal bountifully with me." And then finally in Psalm 143:12, David ends this section

of the Psalms with this prayer to God, "And in Your lovingkindness, cut off my enemies And destroy all those who afflict my soul, For I am Your servant." And so we see this godly man, the man that God appointed as king of Israel, this man who was the man after God's own heart being on the receiving end of opposition, unjust, wicked opposition from evil men.

Now, if you carry this out to David's, greater son, you see that Christ, the sinless one, lived his life in the midst of opposition. The Pharisees opposed him. The Sadducees opposed him. The Roman government opposed him. Herod opposed him. There was all of this opposition and knowing that Christ himself was sinless, we understand that none of that opposition was deserved. None of it was just. None of it was righteous. And so we come and we put these things together and we have an important aspect of a biblical worldview for a Christian to understand and to embrace. It is that we understand that as we walk through this world, we will face opposition. There will be people who detest us, who reject us, who challenge us, who lie about us. We understand that that is going to be our lot because it was the lot of the great saints that went before us, it was the lot of our Lord Jesus himself.

Let me remind you of what Jesus said in the Gospel of John 15, you do not need to turn there. Jesus said in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." And one final passage from 1 John 3 in verse 13, the apostle says to the first century Christians, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you."

Now all of that taken together gives us a very clear, biblical picture, doesn't it? There are not necessarily going to be earthly accolades, there's not necessarily going to be earthly appreciation for us when we live a godly life. Jesus was the most godly man who ever walked on the face of the earth and look at what happened to him, they crucified him. And so just as our Lord had opposition on earth, we understand that we will also, and what we see in Psalm 140 is that this Psalm addresses those times when men maliciously plot against us, and what we need to do, there is a spiritual challenge for us here, first of all, we recognize that this will sometimes be our lot and we accept that, we accept the fact that walking with Christ, being faithful to his word, resisting the the things of the world, especially in a month like Pride Month, recognizing that that will bring opposition to us, and we need to be okay with that. We need to not let that intimidate us away from courage and confidence in standing clearly and firmly for our Lord. We can't do that. But along with that, there is also this spiritual opportunity that when the opposition comes, it is an opportunity for us to draw near to the Lord and rather than resent it and protest against the human injustice of it, to bypass that unproductive spirit of mind, and the, you know, what it stirs up within our carnal hearts, to bypass that and realize that we have an opportunity to draw near to the Lord when these things inevitably come our way. And so Psalm 140 is going to help us think through these things in a very constructive way.

So for our first section of the Psalm tonight, there are three sections that we're going to break it into this evening, the first section we see the problem of the wicked, the problem of the wicked. And when we say the problem of the wicked, we mean what the problem that the wicked present for the righteous. Now David is greatly troubled as this Psalm opens. He's not opening with a spirit of thanksgiving as he did in Psalm 138, here in this Psalm he is immediately asking for help, giving us a sense of the present urgency that is upon him. This threat is immediate, even though we don't know the occasion, the background of this Psalm. Maybe it was when he was fleeing from King Saul. Maybe it was when he was fleeing from his son Absalom in the midst of Absalom's rebellion. Whatever the occasion was, the threat was so immediate that he immediately burst into the throne room of God and asks for help.

Look at those first two verses with me again. He says.

1 Rescue me, Yahweh, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men  
2 Who devise evil things in their hearts; They continually stir up wars.

Now this Psalm as we go through, you'll see it repeatedly emphasizes evil men and wicked men. What David is saying as he as he appeals to the God of righteousness, a holy and just God, he appeals to the character of God and says, "God, because You are just and holy and You are a lover of righteousness, You should look on this situation where wicked men who are Your enemies are striking against me in evil, wicked ways and help me. God, You should help me. You should call to arms Your Spirit and come to my assistance. Give me help in the midst of this opposition that I am facing."

One of the things that we see in this and we'll see...actually, let's just jump ahead for a moment to verse 6, because this is so precious and so key to the Psalm. In verse 6, David says, "I said to the LORD, 'You are my God; Give ear, O LORD, to the voice of my supplications.'" David is appealing to God, God being the God who anointed him as king, God is the one who pulled, called him out of being a shepherd boy and set him on the path that led him to the throne of Israel and established in David the line that would lead to his greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ, David calls upon God and says "You are my God. You belong to me and I belong to You. And as my God, You are responsible for my protection. You have obligated yourself. You have entered into covenant with me to provide for me, to guide me, and to protect me, and because I am in relationship with You like that, I call upon You in my time of trouble that You would lend me the aid and give me the help that I do not have the ability to produce on my own." And so this is a deeply intimate, a deeply intimate prayer as David is calling in the midst of his danger to his God in order to help him.

You read on in verse 3 as he speaks about these opponents of his, he describes them in verse 3 and he says,

3 They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips.

Now most of you are probably like me and you don't like snakes, and even if they're non-venomous snakes, you just kind of are repelled by the sight of a snake, let that kind of give you a sense of the image that David is creating here. "There is a venomous snake that wants to strike me. There is a poisonous viper that is after me." And he's using that as a metaphor to describe the nature of the things that are being said by these wicked men against him. He's calling attention to their wicked tongues. Look at it there in verse 3, "They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips." And so these are wicked men who are plotting against him and saying blasphemous things against God and saying things against David that create a real sense of danger.

Now just for a sense of New Testament correspondence to what we're looking at, this verse, Psalm 140:3, is quoted by the Apostle Paul in his conviction of the guilt of the world in Romans 3. In Romans 3:13, he quotes from Psalm 140:3 when he says, "Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips." And so Scripture condemns all of humanity of being like this, all of humanity of having wickedness under their tongue, all of humanity being guilty of this evil in their hearts. David's words in Psalm 140 are taken in the hands of the Holy Spirit to point to the universality of sin. Every man has this relentless evil lurking in his heart, needing only the proper occasion or the proper provocation for it all to come out. And so, David, recognizing this wickedness in his opponents, asks the Lord to deliver him from their evil plans, and their plans are expressed in their hostile words against him.

Now as we contemplate the reality of opposition to us personally, it's important for us not to cultivate a self-righteous spirit, a proud spirit in ourselves, saying the problem is out there and not to recognize that the problem is also within our own hearts, yours and mine. You and I face this evil of wickedness in our hearts and in our tongues not only from outside us, but we also have to be mindful that that evil is within our own hearts as well. And you can see David's concern about that at the ending of Psalm 139, which leads into Psalm 140. Let me remind you, look at it there with me, how Psalm 139 ended, David says in verse 23, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way." Five times he uses the first person pronoun, "Search me. Know my heart. Try me. Know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any hurtful way in me." There's actually six, "Lead me in the everlasting way." And so while David prays with the earnestness and with the freedom of spirit about his enemies, understand that that comes in the context of him having examined his own heart and asking God to cleanse him from his own sinfulness. It does us no good to pray against God when our enemies come if we're not willing to examine our own hearts and confess our own sin. You see, beloved, the challenge here, and what David shows us, is that he doesn't simply hate sin in his enemies, he hates sin for the fact that it is a violation of the holiness of God so that he hates sin in himself as much as he does the hostile sin against himself that he finds in his enemies.

And so this is humbling in many, many directions, and so he says there at the end of verse 3, a word that's often passed over when the Psalms are read, "Selah" is part of the original inspired text, it should not be overlooked when a Psalm is being read. It's a word that we haven't seen since Psalm 89, so it's been a long time since we've had to comment

on it. It's a word that is not entirely certain what it meant, but the scholars seem to think that maybe it was a pause for musical effects as the Psalm was being sung. It is generally viewed as something that calls for reflection on what was just said before you move on into the next part of the Psalm. So we step back and we look at what David's situation is, he is under attack from evil men, he is asking God to help him in the midst of it. The threat is immediate, the threat is serious, it is something that is a mission critical threat to his life and to his leadership in Israel. People look to undermine leadership and David is a reflection of that. And so we stop and we look at that, we say this can happen even to a godly man, this can happen to God's anointed. It happened to David. It happened to Christ. Every reason to think that at one point in life or another that it will happen to you and me as well. So we cannot, beloved, I say this to encourage you, we cannot control and live in such a way that guarantees that men will never have conflict with us, that men will never oppose us. That is a false view of the Christian life.

I remember years ago hearing someone say that, you know, if we would just be sufficiently friendly and nice to people when we talked to them, you know, we wouldn't have all of this conflict in our lives as we walk through the world. That's not true. That is especially untrue for people who are living a godly life and proclaiming the word of God to their friends, to their neighbors and to their families. The word of God has a confrontational aspect to it. The word of God has, Scripture says in Hebrews 4:12 that it has a dividing impact, that it divides soul from spirit, it divides bone from marrow. And so we cannot, we cannot avoid that as we are faithful to the word of God. You can compromise and take the edge off the conflict, you can backpedal when someone challenges you over the truth of the word of God and you can make the conflict go away that way, but that is not righteous living, that is not being faithful and showing loyalty and fidelity to Christ and to his word. Sometimes the battle comes to us and we can't avoid it, we have to stand firm in it, and engage the conflict even though as believers in Christ, we far prefer peace to controversy, we far prefer reconciliation to hostility. But if the devil or his agents bring the conflict to us, we have to engage the battle. We cannot run from it. David shows us that part of engaging the battle is turning to the Lord in humble, dependent, trusting faith and asking for his protection in the midst of it.

Now having considered the first three verses, as we look at the problem of the wicked, David goes on in verse 4 and renews his prayer. He says in verse 4,

4 Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me from violent men Who have purposed to trip up my feet. 5 The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; They have spread a net by the wayside; They have set snares for me. Selah.

Now beloved, all that I want you to note about this particular section is the vivid imagery in this Psalm and how it conveys a sense of serious danger. He draws upon wartime imagery to describe the danger. "They've purpose to trip up my feet. They've hidden a trap. They've spread a net by the wayside. Their destructive speech is sharp and poisonous, and his enemies are like hunters setting traps for the kill." And so there's this

hidden danger. He sees the men, he sees their wickedness, he sees their hostility against him, he knows that they're setting traps but he doesn't know where the traps are that he might fall into them. So he comes, as it were, and he says, "God, take my feet, guide my feet around the landmines, around the traps so that I would not fall into them." He's asking the Lord to protect him in the midst of the evil people that surround him and in the midst of their evil plots against him.

So the Selah again calls for reflection, and we look at David and we see that he is in the midst of possibly a literal physical war, but even more he is in the midst of a spiritual war that has multiple fronts against it. You've had those times, I've had them where it seems like conflict and opposition comes out of nowhere and then it just kind of multiplies and you're being hit from multiple directions by opposition and criticism and things like that that you weren't expecting and you're left saying, "Well, where did this come from? And when is this going to stop?" And it's blow upon blow. It's as if you're on the ropes in the boxing ring and the opponent seems to have the upper hand as blows rain down upon you one after another. Boom, boom, boom, and you're looking just to catch your breath in the midst of it. That's kind of the spirit that David is describing here, and so it's no wonder that when that is what life is like for him at this time, it's no wonder that he has used so many different terms calling upon God to help him.

Let's look at those terms and just get a sense of the sense of urgency that he brings to his prayer here in Psalm 140. Look at verse 1, "Rescue me." Verse 1, "Preserve me." Verse 4, "Keep me from the hands of the wicked. Preserve me." "God, rescue me, preserve me, keep me, preserve me."

And so, beloved, looking at your family, looking perhaps at your job place, looking perhaps at friends or, you know, even for some even litigation against them, are you finding yourself under unjust attack, especially one that has the potential for very serious consequences? Take heart. David was in exactly that position. The word of God understands. The word of God understands your situation, God sees your situation and is beside you to protect, preserve and keep you in the midst of it. Are you under attack? So was David. So was the Apostle Paul. Read the letter of 2 Corinthians and see how viciously and how relentlessly he was attacked and the attacks were being embraced by a church that should have known that Paul was their best friend. Remember David, remember Paul, and above all, beloved, remember your Lord Jesus as he faced hostility as he walked through this world. And understand that it can just be so unfair and so unjust, and even for some of you young people, it can just be so downright mean what people will say and do in opposition as you're simply trying to live a godly life. Well, understand that this is an opportunity for you to draw near to your God, to recognize that this is the nature of the battle when we live for Christ, and to understand that when you draw near to Christ you're drawing near to one who understands what unjust treatment is like. He knows the hostility of sinners against him so that when you are experiencing it and you go to him for relief, you go to him for protection, you can have certain confidence that Christ understands and receives you sympathetically in the midst of your affliction. That's the whole point of Hebrews 4, you know, let us draw near to the throne of grace so that we may find grace and mercy to help in time of need. That's what David

is doing here, and what this does is it helps you to live above the petty opposition of ungodly men, ungodly women, even ungodly friends. This helps you live above that realm and causes you and can become a great occasion for your spiritual growth and for greater intimacy with your God. This is what the reality of spiritual life is like for us from time-to-time and I find that greatly encouraging and greatly invigorating. Rather than melting under the withering opposition, this actually becomes an opportunity for us to grow in courage and confidence and say, "This is what Scripture tells me to expect." And so rather than shrinking back, it allows us to move forward with even greater boldness when we understand the problem of the wicked from the perspective of Psalm 140.

Now moving on to the second section of this Psalm, we see the protection of the Lord. We saw the problem of the wicked, now in these next verses we see the protection of the Lord. And so with this malicious evil breathing down his neck, David expresses trust. We saw in the prior two Psalms, we saw him expressing thanksgiving side-by-side with the oppression from his enemies. Here in this Psalm we see side-by-side with the oppression from his enemies he is expressing trust. The problem hasn't gone away, the problem is vividly in front of him, and in the midst of it, at the very time of the problem, he is expressing his faith in his God.

Verse 6 through 8, look at it with me. We read this,

6 I said to the LORD, "You are my God; Give ear, O LORD, to the voice of my supplications. 7 O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle. 8 Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; Do not promote his evil device, that they not be exalted. Selah.

And so as we said earlier there in verse 6, "My God," David says, "You are my God," that is expressing the basis upon which he prays. That is his ground of appeal. This is the reason that God should respond to him. God is his God. Yahweh, the covenant-keeping faithful God is David's God and, "God, because You keep Your promises, because You keep faith with Your people, I have hope, I have reason, I have justification, I have a prerogative to pray to You. You saved me, You selected me, You chose me, this is all of Your doing that I am in Your kingdom." As New Testament believers we would say, "It is of Your doing that I am in Your family, my Father, and therefore I have family privileges. I have a covenant prerogative to come to You and ask for help in the midst of the opposition that I am facing. It's because You're my God. You're the One who brought me to Yourself, O Lord, and surely I have the right to pray to You, surely I have reason to expect Your help in the midst of this unjust treatment that I am facing."

And the different names for God appeal to his faithfulness, they appeal to his power, and notice again the battle imagery that he uses in this Psalm. Verse 7, "You have covered my head in the day of battle. The strength of my salvation." That image of covering my head in the day of battle, it reminds us of the spiritual battle imagery that we find in Ephesians 6, and I would like you to turn there with me as we just read through this rather quickly. We understand that behind the human opposition that we face as we live for Christ in this

world, that behind the human opposition there is a very real spiritual opposition that is at work as well and we see the call of God to us in the midst of it. Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." There is a real spiritual demonic aspect to the difficulties that we face as we go through this life. The reason that it feels like a struggle is because it is one. There is a conflict going on in which we are participants but there is a conflict going on in an unseen realm that we cannot touch or see but that is a very real aspect of the struggles that we face in this life.

And so what do we do? Well, notice that he says in verse 13, picking up on the same kind of armor battle imagery that David used in Psalm 140, he says in verse 13, "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." David in Psalm 140 says, "Cover me like a helmet. Protect me. Protect me, O God. Cover my head in the day of battle." And in Ephesians 6, and this is a passage that over the course of time this comes to my mind quite often, you know, the admonition, the exhortation from the Apostle Paul, "Stand firm. Stand firm." You know, it's not that you have to go out and take aggressive action when you are under attack, you don't have to go out and aggressively defend yourself, just stand firm. Be faithful to the truth. Don't yield on the truth. Don't stop trusting in God in the midst of your affliction, and ultimately Scripture says that that kind of resistance is how we defeat the devil.

In James 4, you should look over at James 4 for just a moment here. James 4 in verse 7 it says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Stand firm. Resist. Don't give in. Don't compromise the truth in the midst of these kinds of attacks which are inevitable to come. You know, and it reminds us even of something else that the Lord Jesus said for us not to be surprised when it comes even from those that are closest to us. Jesus said a prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown. A man's enemies will be those of his own household.

So while this is the most painful kind of conflict that we can go through, Scripture equips us for it and shows us the path of persevering through it. We recognize the problem, we seek the protection of the Lord. In this context, David is asking God to keep the wicked from successfully carrying out their evil plans against him. And so he's prayed to the Lord, we look at it again for reflection and here is the thing that we want to see: God is the God who has helped David in the past and therefore David asks for help again. Verse 7 he says, "You have covered my head in the day of battle. You've done this for me. Now I'm asking You to do it once again." And with that sense of confidence, "God, protect me in the midst of it," he now asks God in the following verses to turn the ways of the

wicked against them. It's a sense of boomerang justice. They throw wickedness at the people of God and yet the boomerang when it comes close to its target turns and comes back and becomes a weapon against themselves.

Verse 9 through 11, look at it with me. David says,

9 "As for the head of those who surround me, May the mischief of their lips cover them. 10 May burning coals fall upon them; May they be cast into the fire, Into deep pits from which they cannot rise. 11 May a slanderer not be established in the earth; May evil hunt the violent man speedily."

Now over the course of our exposition of the Psalms, we have spoken often about the imprecatory Psalms, those which call for curses and God's action against their enemies and against the wicked. Now I'm not going to repeat all of that there, simply to highlight that those messages are available for you to review at your leisure. One of the things that I've often said about this is that I truly believe that today's commentators are far too quick to condemn the psalmist for these kinds of prayers, far too quick to say that this has no place in the Christian life and no place in the Christian community. "After all, Jesus told us to forgive our enemies." That's very true, he did say that but, beloved, this is also part of the word of God and we need to understand what it represents in the whole course and the whole broad scope of redemption. First of all, understand this, that when it comes to vengeance upon God's enemies, God himself is going to bring the ultimate vengeance upon those that have opposed him. God is a God of vengeance and the biblical doctrine of hell is an indication that God will defend and vindicate his justice and holiness against his enemies. And so we can't just overturn these prayers against the wicked before we soon find ourselves wondering what God is doing in not forgiving his enemies.

We have to be mindful of the whole context of redemption and the whole context of the fullness of revelation, and in verse 10 we get a hint of eternal retribution that is developed in further revelation in the New Testament where David says, "May burning coals fall upon them; May they be cast into the fire, Into deep pits from which they cannot rise." Now listen, the key to understanding the spirit of these imprecatory statements in the Psalms is to understand this: David is not expressing the sinful animosity against his enemies that we are so prone to feel in our sinful hearts when someone offends us. This is not David taking retaliation against a personal enemy for petty personal reasons. It's not like that even though we tend to read these Psalms with that kind of self-bias in our own favor and think that maybe it's talking about our enemies today. David here is not expressing that kind of personal animosity, understand David is God's anointed king, David has a zeal for the righteousness of God and the righteous cause of the Lord himself. He's asking, we could put it this way: God's cause is David's cause and when the enemies of God are working against his anointed king, David recognizes that that is an enemy against God himself and so he's asking God to vindicate his own cause for the sake of his own truth, for the sake of his own glory. David is simply a proxy in the midst of the greater battle that is taking place.

So we see that he seeks the Lord's protection, he asked God to turn the wickedness of the enemies against themselves, and in so doing he is availing himself of the Lord's protection, the Lord who is his God. So we see the problem of the wicked and the protection of the Lord and then, thirdly, in the last two verses we see the proclamation of trust. The proclamation of trust. As we come to these last two verses, David ends on a note of urgent prayer but it is with trust and thanksgiving that he does so. Look at verses 12 and 13 with me. He says,

12 I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted And  
justice for the poor. 13 Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your  
name; The upright will dwell in Your presence.

That word "surely" in verse 13, "I know" in verse 12, is reflecting the confidence of faith and seeing the outcome before it even occurs. David is living by the ultimate outcome rather than responding emotionally to the immediate provocation that is in front of him. He knows that God is a King who maintains justice and David, having walked through this prayer, having acknowledged dependently the threat that he receives from his enemies, having prayed for the protection of God, he now shows that he means what he prays and that he believes what he has prayed by saying, "I am confident, Lord, that You will maintain the cause of the afflicted. You will uphold justice. And in the end, in the outcome of it all, the righteous will give thanks to Your name and they will dwell in Your presence." And beloved, that is the endpoint, that is the goal for all of our praying in the midst of our own affliction and in the midst of the opposition that we face.

Beloved, here's the challenge for us, the challenge for me, the challenge for you, the aspiration that we set for our hearts: biblical faith in these kinds of praying, biblical faith sees and believes in God's help before it actually arrives in the outward circumstances, before it arrives in time. Biblical faith looks at the character of God in his fidelity to his own people and having appropriated that, having appealed to God to be faithful to him, David says, "I'm confident based on the character, the power and the faithfulness of God, I'm confident the He will answer this prayer and protect me in the end. I'm confident of that and therefore I will give Him thanks now before I see the deliverance in time, I will thank Him now for the help that is certain to come because the help is based not on my measurement of the strength of my adversaries but by the illimitable faithfulness, power, grace, goodness and love of God."

And in that sense, the end of Psalm 140 reminds us of the end of Psalm 23. I think of this Psalm often and I think of the ending of this Psalm often. Listen as I read it, Psalm 23:4 again, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." You see, beloved, we can and we should give thanks to God even before the help arrives in time because by giving thanks beforehand we show that we are walking by faith, not by sight. We are manifesting our confidence in the character of God when we pray this way, and as you pray that way, you

can always remember with the psalmist at the end of Psalm 23, always remember that your trials lead to an eternal home. Goodness and lovingkindness will follow you and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That is the security that sustains us. And maybe it's not so much even personal enemies but just the relentless piling on of adversity and one trial seems to go from one degree of bad to another to another, and leaves you recognizing that there's no human way out of this situation. It's precisely in those times that we look to our God and we say, "Help! And thank You that You will send it in Your good time."

Now I can't help but wrap our time up tonight with just the briefest of reflections on our Lord Jesus who perfectly exemplified the spirit of Psalm 140 for us. Look over at 1 Peter in the New Testament and this will take just a moment. 1 Peter 2. Wicked men afflicted Christ in his ministry. Wicked men executed Christ with great injustice and we read this as we look to our Christ in verse 21 of 1 Peter 2, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." David in Psalm 140 was not taking vengeance in his own hands. David was not responding verbally to his enemies. He was lifting up his soul before God. He was appealing to God for help. He was leaving vengeance in the hands of God. He was leaving retribution in the hands of God. In other words, he was entrusting himself to him who judges righteously. David did that from the perspective of a man who knew sin. Christ did it from a perspective of a man who did not know sin. He kept entrusting himself to him who judges righteously and then in verses 24 and 25, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

And that most glorious act of trust that Jesus exercised as he was being afflicted was when he gave his life up, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit," Luke 23:46. And what happened as a result? What did the Father do with Christ in response? He maintained the cause of his Son. Yes, Christ was crucified. Yes, he was dead. Yes, he was buried. But God did not abandon him to the grave, did not abandon him to a victory by his enemies over him. God raised him from the dead giving the ultimate proof of his fidelity to his promises and God's absolute sovereign ability to overturn the actions of the wicked and to bring good out of them in the end. He did it for his Son. He will do the same for all who are in his Son today.

So beloved, I simply encourage you and call you, in light of this Psalm, to trust the Lord in the midst of your own affliction be it circumstantial or be it by the wicked words and threats of those who are opposed to you. Psalm 37:5 says, "Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it."

Let's pray together.

*And so, Father, in light of that, we do simply commit our ways corporately and individually to You. You know all about our afflictions and you care. You know all about our opponents and our enemies that would seek to resist us and cause trouble for us and all the different aspects of life, family, work, even within the body of Christ. Father, You know all about that. We don't need to inform You about anything and we don't need to find ourselves in a spirit of fear in the midst of it. You are our God and goodness and lovingkindness as a result will follow us all the days of our lives. You might let the flame draw close, we might smell the smoke of the fire of affliction, the fire of the enemy but, Father, the flame will not hurt me, You only design our dross to consume and our gold to refine. And so we trust You, we commit ourselves to You, we're confident that we will see Your faithfulness and Your goodness in the land of the living, and for that we give You thanks and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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