

Sermon 8, Prayer Against the Wicked, Psalm 5

Proposition: Reject the wicked, hear me, and lead me straight out of their presence into yours!
Such is the king's prayer.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, these first several psalms contrast the character and destiny of the righteous and the wicked. We saw last time that Psalm 4 terms the wicked "the sons of men" and that it encourages us to engage with them but also with God. Pray to God about the wicked, and encourage the wicked to turn to God. Well, this psalm seems to be more addressed to situations where the wicked have no interest in listening to your evangelistic efforts. In Psalm 5, the king does not address the wicked directly at all. Instead, he freely talks to God about the wicked. Indeed, he spends quite a while describing the character and destiny of the wicked, and through the psalm he contrasts their wickedness with the righteousness of God and with the blessing that belongs to the one who prays to God instead of sinning against Him. What we will see is that the king prays something like this: Reject the wicked, hear me, and lead me straight out of their presence into yours! Because that is the king's prayer, brothers and sisters, it can and should also be yours. Let's dig into the details.

I. Prayer's Beginning: Three Pleas for God to Listen, vv. 1-2

This prayer, like many others in the psalms, begins with a plea for God to listen. Actually, it begins with three different pleas for God to listen. The king asks God to give ear — a metaphor taken from the human body. We use our ears to listen; God does not have a body or any physical

ears, but we ask Him to hear our words. The king then phrases it differently: pay attention to my groaning! If the ear listens to the words, the mind is the organ that takes in non-verbal groaning. The psalmist begs for God's attention. If he can just get God's attention, he knows that he will get a response. And so his first request is "listen," his second is "consider," and his third is "heed."

Now, I think it goes without saying that we want God to hear our prayers. It is right to beg Him to listen. But I don't think you and I need much encouragement to ask God to listen to us. Rather, I think the main application here runs the other way. We need encouragement to ask ourselves to listen. Our biggest problem in prayer is being lackadaisical, half-hearted, and lazy. Our petitions trail off in the middle because we get distracted with other things. We start to pray and end up thinking about what movie to watch next.

If you won't listen to yourself pray, how can you ask God to listen to you? If you won't give ear to your words, consider your groans, heed the voice of your cries, then why would you expect God to do so? I cannot tell you how many times I have caught myself not listening to my own prayer. I'm sure you all do the same thing. Honestly, perhaps instead of asking God to listen, we should be asking Him to help us pay attention to our own requests!

II. Prayer's Actions, v. 3

You see, the psalmist includes more material that convicts us on this very point.

A. Calling to God, vv. 2b-3a

He advances a reason for God to listen to him: God is His King and His God. This reminds me of the end of Psalm 42: "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God" (v. 11). These pronouns are important — incredibly important. God is not just a King and not just a God. He is *my* King and *my* God. Why does that matter? Because to call Him mine is to announce that He is in covenant with me. He has bound Himself me, to us, by His unfailing promise. He has sworn to be God to us and to our children through Christ. And thus, the psalmist has a claim on God and asks Him to listen precisely because He is bound to His king by covenant. Because the king is bound to God by covenant, we also, united to the king (Jesus), can claim the same privileges that He does.

If you go to Narendra Modi and ask him to intervene on your behalf, he is going to say "You're not one of my constituents; you're an American! I help distressed Indians." And, of course, you won't be able to call him "my prime minister" because he isn't yours. There is no covenant between you and him, not solidarity within the same party and the same country.

God is your king; God is your God. And that's why you pray to Him. The psalmist adds that he will call out in the morning, and that God will hear His voice. This is the first action of prayer — to cry out to God, whether with words or simply with groans (internal or external).

Prayer is calling to God; prayer is speaking to Him so that He can hear your voice. It is not an accident, either, that David says he will pray in the morning. You need to begin the day with God. Don't live your whole day and then, at the end, say "Oh yeah. I guess I should connect with God today." You need His help and strength from the beginning. That's why the king prays to God in the morning, and why you should too.

B. Arranging Prayer Like a Sacrifice, v. 3b

The second thing the king does in prayer is to set up his prayer rightly. He says he will “arrange” his prayer. That’s a funny word to use for prayer. Most of us pray in a rather haphazard fashion, just like we converse with one another. Whatever comes to mind, we start talking about it, and we rarely thoroughly discuss one topic before moving on to the next. That’s OK; the psalmist is not suggesting that a wandering prayer is always inappropriate. Rather, as with everything in Scripture that seems a little strange, the first place to look is the cross-references. That’s right: when you hear a word or phrase that doesn’t fit perfectly where it’s at, see where else it was used, because it’s almost certainly an allusion to another Scripture passage. One of my favorite illustrations of this is Revelation 18 with its extended announcement of the fall of Babylon. It describes all of these judgments that will fall on Babylon, and then adds “for your merchants were the great ones of the earth” (Rev 18:23). Huh? How is that a reason for the judgments on Babylon? The answer, as always, is found in the cross-references. Isa 23:8 says “Who has planned this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, Whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth?” Does it make sense now? The judgment of Babylon in Rev. 18 is patterned on the judgment of Tyre in Is. 23.

Well, in the same way, when David says he will “arrange” his prayer, go to the cross-references. You will find that the word appears elsewhere in descriptions of sacrifice. Thus, Gen 22: “When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood” (v. 9, CSB). The word then appears many times in Leviticus as a description of how priests offer sacrifices. “Aaron's sons the priests are to arrange the pieces, the head, and the suet on top of the burning wood on the altar” (Lev 1:8 CSB).

So to arrange your prayer is to set it up like a priest setting up a sacrifice. You are giving something to God — not an animal or a loaf of bread, but rather, your deepest thoughts and desires. In presenting them to God you are simultaneously sacrificing them to God. By asking Him for help, you are placing yourself in His hand and saying “Thy will be done.” That’s one of the key petitions of the Lord’s prayer.

Do you think of prayer as sacrificing your own thoughts and desires to God? You give these things to God unreservedly. You don’t insist on the right to have them back; you give them up, let Him have them, and then — well, David tells us what you do then.

C. Watching for the Answer, v. 3c

You watch. Some translations render this “look up,” but the point is the same. You start to keep a lookout for the answer. How will God respond?

I spoke a few moments ago about how we often fail to pay attention to our prayer while we are in the very act of praying! Now, though, I have to address the other common problem in our attention: We ask God for something and then forget to watch for the answer. So often, we do not even notice the answer. We fail to draw the connection between what we asked for and what we got. I am guilty of this. I pray, but I rarely watch for the answer. I ask, but can’t tell you

precisely when or how my prayer was answered. Now, obviously the most important element in prayer is not an attempt to quantify or track it. Rather, the most important parts are crying out to God and offering your desires as a sacrifice to Him. But at the same time, if you really care about what you're praying for, you will definitely be watching for the answer. You will be looking for His name to be hallowed, His kingdom to come, His will to be done, your daily bread, and so on.

III. Prayer's Reasons, vv. 4-6

Well, the king uses arguments in prayer. He gives reasons for what he asks. And you and I should imitate this, to the point of using the same reasons. The king shows us how to pray.

A. God's Absolute Separation from Evil, vv. 4-5a

One big reason to pray for help against the wicked is that God is absolutely and totally separated from evil. The king specifically mentions God's opposition to evil, to wickedness, to boasting, to iniquity, to falsehood, bloodshed, and deceit. What do you know? That's seven forms of evil. In other words, God is perfectly opposed to all evil. There is no kind of evil to which He will give a pass, no evil that He will let prosper. He is utterly and totally separated from it. This separation is spoken of in spatial and visual terms: God will not allow evil in His house or even before His eyes. He is utterly, totally separated from it. You won't find that the butler did it in the Almighty's house. His staff is as absolutely incorruptible as He is.

This is a motive for prayer and an argument in prayer, brothers and sisters. Do you see the wicked prospering all around us? Of course you do. It is one of our greatest griefs as we vex our souls from day to day in this land where Netflix and Pornhub and the World Economic Forum pump their filth out and cover the land with vile putrid wickedness. But God is not for that. God is against that. God is perfectly righteous, perfectly separated from sinners, perfectly unwilling to look on that with any favor.

Later on the Psalm will refer to the wicked as "watchers" (v. 8). They are watching the king, waiting for him to slip up and be overthrown. But God is not watching them. He won't look at their evil. Or, rather, insofar as His eyes are on them, He is watching them in a hostile way, just like they are watching the footsteps of His Anointed. He is utterly separate from evil.

B. God's Destruction of Evildoers, vv. 5-6

That separation is manifested in His destruction of evildoers. The wicked shall not stand in the judgment, nor the boastful before Yahweh's eyes. He hates the workers of iniquity.

You thought that God loves everybody? Remember that it is the Apocrypha that says God hates nothing He has made. Psalm 5 says that He hates every worker of evil, and that this hatred manifests itself in destroying liars and abhorring the one who sheds blood and tells lies.

Brothers and sisters, sin is no light matter. The more you realize what it is and how awful it is, the more you will hate it! Those who take refuge in the Son of God are freed from their sin. They are classed with the righteous, not with the wicked. But were it not for the mercy of God to us in His king, we would all be wicked and we would all be cut down mercilessly by the wrath of a justly offended God. You have lied and I have lied. We have brought destruction on ourselves, and that destruction has only been averted by the interposition of Jesus Christ, Yahweh's King who stood between His wrath and His people and saved them. No wonder this psalm ends with a

declaration that God surrounds the righteous with favor like a shield! The grace of God in Jesus is indeed a shield not just from the arrows of the wicked, but from the far more deadly wrath of God.

So if the wicked are rampant, just wait. God will catch up with them. If you are feeling guilty, or if you are objectively guilty, hide yourself in Jesus Christ. And, of course, turn away from being a man of bloodshed and deceit. Walk in integrity through Jesus.

IV. Prayer's Location, v. 7

Well, the wicked are cast out of God's presence and house, but the king has free access to both.

A. In God's House

Prayer most naturally arises in God's house. But even the king, and how much more we, enter God's house only for one reason: God's steadfast love, His covenant commitment to love us through thick and thin. We call it "unconditional love" because it doesn't stop even when we sin.

This is the secret, brothers and sisters. This is how the king enters God's house and this is how we enter God's house. The fact that you are not banished like the wicked, but invited to God's house like the king, tells you that you are the recipient of the Almighty's steadfast love. Because He loves you, what should you do? Go to church, to His house, and pray to Him. Gather with His people and bow your body and your heart in prayer to the Lord of Hosts.

Where is prayer to be found? In the House of Prayer.

B. Toward God's Temple

Prayer is also to be directed toward God's temple. Daniel enacted this by opening his window and praying toward Jerusalem. God's temple is no longer in Jerusalem; it is preeminently in Christ, the true temple, and thus our prayers should be directed toward Him. We pray to the Father through the Son, just as David prayed toward the physical Temple/tabernacle in his day.

So if you want to be strengthened in prayer, go to God's house and pray toward Jesus. If you want to be weakened in prayer, stay out of God's house and don't pray toward Jesus.

V. Prayer's Petitions, vv. 8-11

What does the king pray for now that he has addressed so many different aspects of prayer? His petitions are arranged under three headings.

A. Lead Me in Straight Paths

The first is a request to not be like the wicked. The king prays for guidance: Lead me in straight paths! The psalmist specifically relates this to the presence of his foes. Because they are wicked, Lord, I need you to show me the right path. As we saw in Psalm 1, the counsel of the wicked feels omnipresent. It is as pervasive as the world itself, for it is one of the biggest things the world does — to create a pattern for living and to train whole cultures and civilizations in that pattern. To walk in the wicked's counsel is to accept a non-Christian, anti-God pattern for living and to live in accordance with it. The righteous do not walk in the wicked's counsel; the word of God is their counselor. They pray for God to lead them in righteousness. This refers to walking in the way of duty and obedience, and also to being made righteous by Christ's death in your place. Prayer begs that God would lead the one praying in straight paths. The wicked don't want you to stay on the straight and narrow. Their dearest wish is that you will become like them and

give approval to their wickedness by your own. What they hate more than anything is an upright man. And so know that you will not stay upright without prayer. Without God's leading, you will walk right off the straight path like the dwarves in Mirkwood. Good luck finding it again!

B. The Wicked Are Evil; Reject Them!, vv. 9-10

The second petition the king makes is directed against the wicked. This is an imprecatory petition, asking God to reject the wicked and make them fall. Is this right for someone whose duty is to love his neighbor? Yes and no. All of these requests can be translated as future tenses rather than requests — that is, “They will fall; you will cast them out” instead “let them fall; cast them out!” But this does not really change the problem. Either way, you are looking forward to the destruction of the wicked, even if in one case you are asking for it and in the other merely comforting yourself with it, you are still taking some measure of comfort from and involvement in this destruction.

These petitions are righteous. They are from the lips of the king, whose job it is to cut off and cast out the wicked. It is his job because he rules on Yahweh's behalf, and Yahweh will do these things to the wicked and therefore his king must do them as well.

We too are kings and priests to God. It is also our job to see the overthrow and casting out of the wicked within the domains we rule. Would it be righteous for you to tolerate within your business a bookkeeper who was stealing the salaries of the other employees? If the injured employees complained to you, and you said, “Now, now, the spirit of the gospel says to forgive our enemies. I'm going to leave this bookkeeper in his job and I want you to deal with it,” would that be the Christian thing to do? Obviously not. Precisely because God has dominion over the whole universe, we pray to Him to deal with the wicked in every sphere as we undertake the duty of dealing with them in the spheres where we have authority. We are only asking God to do His job when we pray for Him to cast out the wicked and to let them fall through their own wickedness. We are also praying against our own sin, and also praying that we would do what we ought to do in dealing with sin in our own hearts, homes, churches, businesses, and states.

David's enemies opposed him because he was God's king. That's why Paul can take this description of David's enemies and apply it to all mankind. Everyone is born opposing Christ and standing against His righteousness.

C. Give the Righteous Joy in Your Presence, v. 11

But just as it is the duty of the Almighty to punish the wicked, so it is also His duty to reward the righteous. In the same way, it is our duty to reward the righteous in our own spheres. The reward the righteous described here is fundamentally *joy*. The one who takes refuge in God is joyful, singing and exulting in God. Do you pray for this joy, this blessing that belongs to all those who take refuge in the Son of God?

VI. Prayer's Confidence, v. 12

You see, prayer is confident because of the nature of our God. He will bless the righteous, surrounding him with favor, shielding him by His grace from all the fiery darts of the wicked and all God's own wrath.

Do you have confidence in prayer? You would if you arranged your prayer like a sacrifice and watched for the answer. You would have confidence because you would have gotten a positive answer many times.

Brothers and sisters, God the Father blessed His Son and surrounded Him with favor. If you are in Christ, this blessing is yours as well. So take heart and pray like Heaven, and you will be heard. Amen.