

Prayer for a Nation in Trouble

Psalm 12

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 1-12-2014

Introduction

Today you will have one of my rare two point sermons. And if you have an outline you are thinking, “Yeah, right. But there are about a dozen sub-points.” But I’m not actually going to be covering all of those. I’ve put them there for completeness. But I am hoping to accomplish two things this morning. First, to realistically describe how bad things are so that our spirits will be stirred up to prayer and action and secondly to give hope that we can make a difference. The very fact that David addressed this Psalm to the chief musician at the temple, shows that he had hopes to return to the temple. He was not giving up. He had hopes that God would turn this situation around. But let’s look first at five things that contributed to Israel’s decline.

I. Five things that have caused our nation to decline

A. *Failure of the church to be salt and light (v. 1)*

The first had to do with God’s people no longer being salt and light within Israel. Verse 1: “**Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.**”

The fact that the faithful have disappeared implies that they they were there at one point but that they had left. We are not told how the faithful have disappeared. One assumption is that they have defected to David’s army. When we get to 2 Samuel 18 we will see that tens of thousands of faithful people left the country and defected to David. And any time that happens, the influence of faithful people is no longer felt within that nation. When the Pilgrims and Puritans left England and moved to America, America was profoundly shaped for the positive, and England was profoundly changed for the worse. Why? Salt and light people were being removed from England, and America was becoming almost nothing but salt and light.

Well, we are in a similar situation to what England experienced at the time of the founding of the Colonies. Obviously the church has not left America. Instead, what we find is that the church has become so degenerate that it is no longer acting as salt and light. But the impact is exactly the same. We have become an increasingly godless society.

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There is hot debate on how high incidents of adultery are in America, some saying that as many as 60% of married men and 50% of married women have cheated, and others arguing that it may be as low as 22% for men and 14% for women. But even the low figure of one in four men shows that faithfulness in marriage seems to be rapidly falling. But one statistic that is pretty hard to get around is the incidence of STDs reported on the website of the Center for Disease Control. That's a conservative figure because it records only the cases actually treated by doctors. At least, that's my understanding. And *those* figures are astounding. Last year a minimum of 110 million Americans had an STD with 20 million new infections being reported in one year. The cost for treating those was \$16 billion. And the reason that this is a significant statistic is that the Bible treats sexual degeneracy as a barometer of a nation's health. And when 1 in 5 Americans are claimed to have incurable herpes (which is only one STD), I would say that God's judgments are being felt. God is not mocked, whatever a man sows, that will he also reap.

One of the parts of the handout for the prayer workshop yesterday was a list of the most serious sins and strongholds of our nation. We won't look at that list today, but I would encourage you to pray that list. 1.2 million abortions per year. Last year, 1.2 million additional violent crimes. They really should be reporting the abortions along with the violent crimes, but they don't. Last year there were 8.975 million property crimes. And the list goes on. Burglaries are so common in Chicago that police issued a statement last year that they will no longer be responding to 911 calls about most crimes where the perpetrator is no longer on the premises. Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy said, "I don't mean to be flippant here, because I've been the victim of a burglary at least three or four times [but] I'd rather have the officer on [the] street, where he can prevent the shooting." I find it remarkable that the Police Superintendent has been burglarized three or four times. But here's a situation where the tyranny of crime prevention (which the Bible nowhere authorizes) is heavily engaged in (including their failed attempt to outlaw guns once again), but on issues of responding to a crime that has already happened (which is what the Bible says should be the government's main role) they are notifying people that they will probably not do anything.

Now, to give a little perspective, you can expect the ungodly to *be* ungodly. What troubles me is when the *church* shows no godliness. When I look at the church I cry out, "**Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.**"

Think about it: Where are any Christians who truly love and keep the Sabbath and call it their delight? It's hard to find them.

Where are those who do not covet their neighbor's wife through pornography, or who do not covet their neighbor's house or car or in other ways try to keep up with the Joneses? The breaking of the tenth commandment is rampant in the church.

Where are those who never break their promises, or whose word can always be trusted? Many Christians don't even keep their signed contracts, let alone promises that they make to their families, or that they make to their church.

I don't think the Ten Commandments are being kept in the church of Jesus Christ – not a one of them. We tend to think that we are pretty good at keeping the first commandment – thou shalt have no other gods before me – and yet Deuteronomy chapters 6-11 (which gives God's exposition of what He means by first commandment) shows that the church violates the first commandment left and right. First of all, they violate the first commandment by looking to alternative sources of law than those given by God. I was just talking with a man last week who has a reputation of being a godly man, yet he absolutely rejects the case law applications of the ten commandments given in Deuteronomy 6-26. He doesn't like them. He thinks he is keeping the Ten Commandments, but if you read God's exposition of what each commandment means in Deuteronomy 6-26 you realize that he is not keeping them, which means that his godliness is an illusion. Deuteronomy makes it quite clear that the source of your law is the defacto God you have chosen, and most Christians have chosen to honor the laws of society, not the laws of God. So any Christian who hates God's case laws has chosen another god to be his lawgiver. It's idolatry.

Deuteronomy's exposition of the first commandment says that we are serving other gods when we send our children to the Canaanites to be educated. Well, that means almost the entire church has broken the first commandment by sending their kids to government schools.

Those same chapters say that we are having other gods when we treat the State as Messiah or even when we ask the State to do what family and church should be doing. And there are many other applications of the first commandment that the church has been violating. And you go through the rest of Deuteronomy's exposition of the ten commandments, and it blows you away. It makes you realize that we are not just a nation in trouble, we are a church in trouble.

This knowledge can either make you despair, or it can drive you to prayer. I hope it does the latter. When the church is in desperate need of

Reformation and revival, we must turn to the Lord. We must say, “There is nothing too difficult for God.” We must cry out with David, “Help Lord” and stand in confidence in His strength to change America. But first of all we have got to recognize that we are a church in trouble and a nation in trouble. It is only when we see the problems that we will take action needed to solve the problems.

B. No integrity in word (v. 2)

The second thing that led Israel downhill and that also drove David prayer was a lack of integrity in men’s words. Verse 2 says, “**They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.**” David was quite frustrated with the leaders who had previously pretended to be his friend, and yet it had turned out that the whole time they had been engaged in double-speak and flattery and they lacked of integrity. Integrity of words is essential to a stable society. Honoring of contracts is essential to a stable society. And when contract law is broken at the highest levels of our nation, we are in deep trouble. In devotions this past week we were reading a short devotional by R. J. Rushdoony on how societies degenerate into oblivion when truth is no longer valued. Back when we used to have a Christian civilization, you could trust a handshake to mean something because the ones who did it were imitating the God who was truthful and who gave us a truthful, inerrant Scripture. Truth was so important to God that it became important to them. But now, President’s do not keep their word; Congressmen break their promises almost as soon as they are in office. Pastors do not keep their word. And though in business we still have a common consensus on contract law, even that seems to be disappearing. In fact, court cases have been destroying it.

C. The absolutizing of freedom of speech (v. 4)

Related to this is point C. The third thing that led Israel into a downward spiral was the absolutizing of freedom of speech. Now the reason I say “absolutizing” is that there is a certain sense in which all Christians should support freedom of speech, but the law of God sets limits to those freedoms. It’s like a train is most free and most powerful when it has the restrictions of the tracks. And in early America when they understood the law of God (those railroad tracks), they didn’t take our Constitution’s guarantee to freedom of speech in an absolute sense. For example, the states continued to punish blasphemy as going beyond freedom of speech and attacking the God who gave liberty. It had to be punished or we could no longer maintain the liberties of God. If you don’t punish people who blow

up the railroad tracks, the train of life will no longer have the freedom to ride on those tracks. Once God's limitations are removed, freedom of speech will drive a country into self-defeating and dangerous actions and even into tyranny. Verse 4 says, "**Who have said, 'with our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?'**" In effect they were saying, "Nobody can tell me what I can and can't say. I am the master of my own tongue." How far do they take this today? Thankfully, not all the way, but some have used the freedom of speech argument to justify *child* pornography.

The total free speech advocates are demanding that they be able to say anything that they want, and print anything that they want. George Grant has written a probing analysis of the suicidal positions that the ACLU has taken on this and other areas. And that book illustrates the first part of this verse: "**with our tongue we will prevail.**" The liberals want to use the free speech clause to blow up the railway of liberty. They don't just want freedom from God's Lordship in the area of *speech*. No, this goes way beyond that. They want to prevail against the Lord in all of His restrictions. But the ACLU didn't invent that. All the way back here in David's day it was free speech for everyone except believers. And the same is true today. Homosexuals can use Photoshop tricks to take pictures of church leaders and make them look like perverts, and the courts defend their right to do so as free speech. But if these same pastors who are being libeled dare to call the perverts' own actions as sin and an abomination before God, all of a sudden you don't have free speech. You could end up being punished for hate crimes. You see, it is not about free speech. David had free speech in his country. He believed in very limited government. But Absalom, Ahithophel and others were abusing free speech to blow up the whole railway tracks of liberty.

And you think, "But what can I do against such pervasive evil?" You can make sure that *you* have integrity of speech, that you teach your *children* to have integrity of speech, that you severely punish lying in your children. Again, God's people are the key. The church is the nursery of the kingdom. 2 Chronicles 7:14 doesn't require the whole society to repent in order to bring healing to the land. No. It says, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." So if the church will do it's responsibility to be salt and light, God can handle the society. Don't bail out in despair. Do like David did, and go to the One for whom all things are possible.

D. The oppression of the helpless (v. 5)

The fourth thing that drove Israel into God's curse and judgment was oppression of the helpless. Verse 5 says, "**For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise,**" says the LORD; "**I will set him in the safety for which he yearns.**" We aren't told who the poor were that were oppressed, or who the needy were. But the application in America is pretty obvious if you put millions of unborn American's into the equation. It is the babies in the womb who are the oppressed segment of society.

E. The legalization of an anti-Christian law-order (v. 8)

The fifth and last thing that drove David to prayer was the legalization of an anti-Christian law-order. Look at verse 8: "**The wicked prowl on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men.**" With the unlawful transition in government under Absalom, there came a transition into an unlawful law order. And it happened overnight. It had to happen, or Absalom would need to immediately step down. If you get into power unlawfully, you will tend to ignore the law. And all who supported Absalom had to ignore the law. But the unintended consequence was that restraint on sin would automatically wither. Even if they didn't intend it, it would automatically happen. Just by way of analogy, when conservatives today violate the constitution on some points, they lose their moral ground to be outraged over even more egregious violations of the constitution. They have no moral leg to stand on. And so the principle is that "**The wicked prowl on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men.**"

It should be no surprise to us that sexual abuse is on the rise when abusive pornography is legal. Our politicians don't seem to see the connection, but it is obvious on the face of it. It should no surprise us that all life is devalued when abortion is made legal and when evolution is taught. It should be no surprise that there are over 2 million porn sites that prey upon our children in the most vile of ways when the courts exalt the right of porn. Christians who do not think we should impose Biblical law upon society, do not understand the logical alternatives. There is always going to be a morality imposed upon society. If it isn't God's perfect law of liberty it will be the horrendous laws of man that make men groan. It should be no surprise to find school shootings on the rise when the courts have forced the ten commandments out of the classrooms and when our schools have taught us that we are no different than animals. When the government itself exalts any form of vileness, those vile people will instantly lose all fear of prowling and start looking for prey. We are in an impossible situation - that is, impossible

for man. But God says, “Step aside. This is a job for the Almighty.” Do not despair. Go to prayer.

II. True Remedies For the Decline Of Our Great Nation

A. Faith that God’s plan extends to cultures (v. 1a)

1. He is in covenant with us (“LORD” = Yahweh)
2. God is concerned when cultures go bad (v. 1)
3. He is the judge of the whole earth (v. 3)
4. God is Lord over what pagans say (implied in v. 4)
5. He is our protector (v. 5)
6. His Word is inerrant

And as you pray, three things should characterize your prayers. First of all, Faith. These verses exhibit a faith that God’s plan extends to cultures. Unfortunately, not everybody believes that, and so it is hard for them to pray in faith for God to change culture. In your outlines I have given eight sub-points. I will only focus on one, but briefly, we can have faith that God cares about our culture because He is Yahweh, the name that defines Him as the Lord of life who is in covenant relationship to even planet earth. Yes they have broken the covenant, but God is still interested in the covenant being successful. So that is His covenant name. Second, verse 1 shows that God is concerned when cultures go bad. Third, verse 3 shows that God is the judge of the whole earth. Fourth, verse 4 implies at least that God is Lord over what pagans say. They don’t like it; they resist it; but He is still Lord. Fifth, He is our protector. Sixth, His Word is inerrant. Seventh, God is not simply concerned about the present, but is multi-generational in His perspective, and is thus interested in providing for our future. And eighth, verse 7 shows that God knows how to keep us from stumbling. This whole Psalm is designed in these eight ways to raise our faith that God cares about America.

When verse 1 says, “**Help, LORD**” what kind of help is he asking for? Is he only asking for help in his Bible study? or help in evangelism? or help in raising a family? There are many who limit their conception of what God wants to do to private or religious exercises. But this Psalm is clear. David wanted help for his nation. He was asking God to take on the job of transforming culture. If you do not believe that it *is* God’s job to transform

cultures you will not have the faith to take this prayer on your lips. We need a church stirred up to believe that God's civil laws continue to apply, that Romans 13 continues to apply, that culture and politics continues to be important to Him; that God is not careless about civic matters. Pray for me and another pastor as we go around Nebraska trying to convince pastors of this. Our help is in the Lord even in the area of national issues.

But let's focus on just one reason for faith – the inerrancy of Scripture. Verse 6 says, **“The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.”** In other words, there is no dross or bad stuff in the silver of God's Word. There are no impurities or errors. The Bible is the purest of the pure silver. There is nothing that you should be in disagreement with. And yet Christians are shocked that you would want our society to implement Biblical law. Sadly, Christians look down on Biblical law. And of course they pick out the most offensive passages they could find. I remember Dobson saying something to the effect that if Biblical law was implemented then we would have to stone children, and nobody wants that. But I would beg to differ. The juvenile delinquents in New York City that terrorize their parents, kill policemen and commit crimes, need to be punished with the same laws that adults are. That's all that that Scripture is stating. It doesn't take rocket science to figure out that this would inhibit crime much more quickly than coddling those youth.

If the church is to be able to make a difference in society, we cannot be embarrassed by Biblical law. And Jesus says that He will be ashamed of us if we are ashamed of Him and His word. But if we are convinced that His Word is pure silver with no dross, then we will have faith to ask God to establish that pure Word over culture. Does that make sense? Isaiah 42 prophecies that Christ will establish justice in the governments of the world, and says in verse 4, **“He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.”** That is saying that it is Biblical law that is the definition of Biblical justice. And since it is God's will that the Gentile nations wait for that, we can have faith to claim God's law for culture right here in Nebraska and Iowa.

And yesterday we saw that prayer is a big part of that. There was a good quote in Operation World which said, “When man works, man works. When man prays, God works.” By faith we need to step aside and say, “This *is* a job for the Almighty.” He's up to the job. Nothing is impossible for Him. And His perfect Word is a perfect foundation for society. Do we have faith in that Word?

7. God's work is multi-generational, and not present oriented (v. 7)

8. He knows how to keep us from stumbling (v. 7)

B. Hope: We Are Authorized To Pray For Victory (vv. 3,5,7)

1. Imprecatory prayers imply God's intention for victory (v. 3)

But secondly, we must have hope. We must not only have faith that God *can* do this, but a Biblical hope that He *will* do this. This is where eschatology comes into play. Are we authorized to pray for the Christianization of society? Yes, in the Great Commission and in hundreds of other passages. Why would God authorize us to pray the content of verse 3 if it was not His will that this world become converted and liars cease from the land? David says, “**May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things.**” IF all flattering lips and all liars are cut off, then we are talking about a Christianized society. That is not a ridiculous prayer. That is praying God's will. God wants us to pray that prayer in every age because he is willing to hear that in every age. Imprecatory prayers imply that it is not God's will that evil should triumph - otherwise we wouldn't be authorized to pray for the wicked to be cut off. And by the way, they can be cut off by being converted since Christ as their substitute was cut off from the land in their place, if they put their faith in Him. But if it is God's will for us to pray Imprecatory Psalms, it gives me tremendous hope that God wants to do something about the situation.

2. God's promises to the oppressed imply His intention for victory (v. 5)

Secondly, why would God authorize us to pray verse 5 if it was not His will for the righteous to ask for victory and to be preserved? “**‘Now I will arise,’ says the LORD; ‘I will set him in the safety for which he yearns.’**” The fact that God authorizes us to pray this in the New Covenant gives me hope.

3. God's preservation of the godly through generations implies His intention for victory (v. 7)

Thirdly, we have hope for the future of America because God authorizes us to pray and to declare by faith the truth of verse 7: “**You shall keep them, O LORD, you shall preserve them from this generation forever.**” What's He keeping? He is keeping the Old Testament inspired

Scriptures from this generation and forever because it is His gift to His people to multiple generations, which implies that there will be multiple generations who love God's Word as well.

Too many times we lack hope for the future because we have had so many set backs in the present. But hope is not based on what is possible. When these words were said, there was nothing that seemed possible. But David founded his hope upon the eternal word of God. So we should pray in faith and we can pray in hope.

C. Commitment: We Must Desire To Be The Antithesis Of The World

1. Commitment to be godly (v. 1)

But if our prayers are to avoid hypocrisy, then we must also pray from commitment. Verse 1 implies that David is committed to being godly and to being faithful. That makes sense. The farmer who prays for a harvest without planting or doing his responsibilities cannot expect his prayers to be answered. Consider Lot in the city of Sodom. Though the New Testament tells us that Lot's righteous soul vexed him from day to day, he never did anything about it. He failed to be salt and light and he failed to make a difference in that city. But in contrast, look at the difference that faithfulness to preach had on Nineveh, even though Jonah preached with bad attitudes. I would much rather have a salty church with bad attitudes than an unsalty church with good attitudes like Lot had and make absolutely no difference in society. Yeah, I'll take the bad attitudes of Jonah over the good attitudes of Lot if I have to choose. But hopefully we can have both. Daniel did. Look at the difference that a small handful of faithful Christians were able to have in Babylon. Daniel, Shadrack, Meshech and Abednego knew that they couldn't make a difference by themselves, but with God they were a majority. All it takes is a faithful minority with faith, hope, and commitment, and huge differences can be made.

So we need to first of all commit to being godly (verse 1).

2. Commitment to glorify God with our speech (vv. 2-4)

Secondly, we need to commit to glorifying God with our speech (verses 2-4). That's the implication of those verses. If we say we are pro-life with our lips but our actions are far from it, then our prayer lacks credibility. Why would God answer our prayer when we are so uninterested in the prayer being answered that we do nothing to be personally involved.

3. Commitment to minister to the oppressed - to be involved in the pro-life movement (v. 5)

Thirdly, the church needs to commit to minister to the oppressed. That's what was needed to reverse verse 5.

4. Commitment to exalt God's law-order (vv. 6,8b)

Fourth, we must be committed to God's law order. We cannot sincerely pray against vileness that is exalted among the sons of men if we are opposed to God's law order ourselves. You can't pick and choose among God's commands. And so praying this Psalm logically commits us to exalting God's law in the nation. Vileness can only be defined in terms of God's law. We must be committed to putting on the opposite of verse 8.

Conclusion – three further applications

Let me end with three concluding thoughts. Though the wicked may triumph for a time in America, Psalm 2 reminds us that they will not triumph forever. 2 Timothy 3 tells us that the wicked “**will progress no further** [they can progress to a point, but they will progress no further], **for their folly will be manifest to all...**” It is saying that there is only so far that wickedness can go without blowing itself up. I think we can expect that to be true in America. Even as the humanists right now are triumphing against Christianity on issue after issue, it is beginning to alienate the populous against their radical ways. Satan tends to defeat himself with his own victories.

Secondly, don't take a “who cares” attitude about our nation. Groan as David groaned over moral failures. Yearn for liberty from tyranny as verse 5 talks about. Groaning over sin and yearning for liberty glorifies God.

Lastly, be aware of the vastly different worldviews that humanists and Christians have. What David was grieved over caused the humanists to rejoice. What David rejoiced over caused the humanists to grieve. Don't think that there will ever be a peace treaty between the two. Don't try to make humanism happy. They are two irreconcilable systems at cultural war with each other.

This is a call for the church to be neither pessimistic nor care free, but to have a realistic perspective of what needs to be accomplished and an attitude of faith, hope, and commitment to making those changes. Pray this prayer. Pray that God will destroy humanism and once again cause His truth to triumph in our nation. Amen.

Prayer for a Nation in Trouble

Psalm 12

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 1-12-2014

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