

Faith in the Face of Evil

Psalm 52

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

To the choirmaster. A Maskil of David, when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."

Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man?

The steadfast love of God endures all the day.

² Your tongue plots destruction,
like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit.

³ You love evil more than good,
and lying more than speaking what is right. *Selah*

⁴ You love all words that devour,
O deceitful tongue.

⁵ But God will break you down forever;
he will snatch and tear you from your tent;
he will uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah*

⁶ The righteous shall see and fear,
and shall laugh at him, saying,

⁷ "See the man who would not make
God his refuge,

but trusted in the abundance of his riches
and sought refuge in his own destruction!"

⁸ But I am like a green olive tree
in the house of God.

I trust in the steadfast love of God
forever and ever.

⁹ I will thank you forever,
because you have done it.

I will wait for your name, for it is good,
in the presence of the godly.

Introduction: The Stark Realism of the Bible

The realities of life in a fallen world that confronted us this past week in Haiti were sometimes overwhelming. The depth and breadth of the need was more that we could even attempt to wrap our minds around and even begin to comprehend. Even more overwhelming than the material poverty was the knowledge that corruption by those entrusted with leadership is responsible for so much of the suffering in Haiti.

We shared our flights with several other mission teams going to serve in Haiti, and we knew that God's people in America and around the world are ready and willing to help rebuild Haiti, but the money and resources that pour into Haiti usually end up in the hands of the few wealthy and powerful people, who spend it on themselves. The work that does get done is

often marred by bribes, theft, vandalism and neglect. It is overwhelmingly sad, and some people will say that situations like we witnessed this week prove to them that there is no God and that the Bible is a fairy tale.

But the truth is that the Bible is the most helpful and realistic book for understanding a world of suffering and evil. Far from being a fairy tale, the Bible is starkly realistic about the state of our world. In fact, the Bible is much more realistic about our world, its problems and the heart of man than secular humanism that denies the Bible and embraces a naturalistic view of the world that is either unrealistic or else devoid of all hope.

In fact, the world of the Bible is much closer to Haiti and its conditions than it is to our life in the United States. Extreme poverty, corruption, the persecution of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked are all very clearly displayed in Scripture. But we are not left without hope. We are also shown the truth of a God who rules over all and who over-rules the evil and corruption of this world, saving His people and keeping His promises even in the face of overwhelming opposition.

A. Those Who Love Evil, vv. 1-7

In Psalm 52, David is facing overwhelming evil. The title tells us that David wrote this psalm after Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, "David is in the house of Ahimelech." But the reality of the situation was more serious that we might deduce just from the title. You may remember that David fled to the tabernacle and to Ahimelech after Saul sent men to surround his house and he escaped in the night when his wife lowered him out of the window in a basket. When David was in the tabernacle, he saw Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen, and he knew this meant danger, so he fled to Gath and then to the caves.

1 Samuel 22 tells us that Doeg did indeed go to Saul and tell him that he had seen David with Ahimelech in the tabernacle. But Saul did not just send men to go to the tabernacle to look for David. He summoned Ahimelech and all his household and all the priests who were serving the tabernacle in Nob, and demanded that they explain why they showed hospitality to David and that they turn him over to Saul. Of course, Ahimelech and the priests did not know where David was. In fact, David had told them that he was on a mission on behalf of Saul, so Ahimelech told Saul the truth: he helped David, but he thought David was serving Saul.

Saul's response was as insane as it was evil and violent. He ordered his men to kill all of God's priests. But the king's servants would not strike the priests of the Lord, so Doeg the Edomite struck them down. Then the whole city of Nob, the city of the priests, was put to the sword and every man, woman and child was killed. In fact, Saul even had all of the livestock put to death. This is a striking detail because Saul had failed to kill the livestock of the Amalekites, which is what had cost him the kingdom. So Saul was treating the priests of the Lord worse than he had treated the pagan enemies of God.

This terrible act of savage evil causes David to lament and cry out to the Lord, and the Lord shows David the truth about the evildoers. David writes Psalm 52 as a powerful statement of the truth about God, His people and His enemies, in the face of violent evil corruption.

I. Their Words, vv. 1-4

The first thing David says about the evildoers is about their words:

*Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man?
The steadfast love of God endures all the day.
2 Your tongue plots destruction,
like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit.
3 You love evil more than good,
and lying more than speaking what is right. Selah
4 You love all words that devour,
O deceitful tongue.*

The words of the evil are marked by their boasting, their plotting and their lying. With no respect for God and His ways, evil people put themselves in the place of God. They think their plans will succeed, even when their plans are directly opposed to God's will. They plot and scheme to overthrow and harm God's people.

When Jean Paul first started preaching in Haiti, voodoo priests came and threatened him with death if he did not stop preaching Jesus. They told him he would die, but he warned them that if they did not turn and seek the Lord, they would be the ones to die. He meant that they would die eternally, cut off from God forever, but they cursed him and wanted him to die immediately. God turned their curses back on their own heads, and two of those voodoo priests died within a couple of weeks of publicly threatening Jean Paul. Today, the area of LaPlaine where Reformation Hope now has two compounds with a large church, a school, an orphanage, a medical clinic, a restaurant and a guest house has no voodoo temples, where there were several just ten years ago.

Truly, although the words of the evil opponents of God are full of boasting and plotting and lying, it is the steadfast love of the Lord that endures forever.

2. Their Loves, vv. 3-4

In addition to their words, David also tells of the loves of the wicked: They love evil more than good. They not only lie, but they love lying more than speaking the truth. Evil people do evil because they love evil. They think their hearts will find happiness and satisfaction in successfully plotting against the righteous and in spreading lies. This is where they have set their affections, to their own hurt and shame.

3. Their Destiny, vv. 5-7

Their love of evil will indeed be to their own hurt and shame because God is just and His justice will not sleep. Rather, David tells us of the destiny of those workers of evil –

⁵ *But God will break you down forever;
he will snatch and tear you from your tent;
he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah*

⁶ *The righteous shall see and fear,
and shall laugh at him, saying,*

⁷ *“See the man who would not make
God his refuge,
but trusted in the abundance of his riches
and sought refuge in his own destruction!”*

God will break down the evil, and He will establish His people. Sometimes we do see this, even in this life. Voodoo is on the run in Haiti, and Christianity is spreading very quickly. What was once a nominally Catholic country mired in widespread voodoo is increasingly becoming a Christian nation. While many people still consult voodoo priests, the practice is now considered shameful and is more and more done in secret.

Jacob Lee is seeing similar things happen in Uganda. Reaching Africa’s Unreached has faced opposition from Muslim extremists who have sent in scholars to debate him and to stir up opposition to the word and even from some black nationalists who call themselves Christians who oppose having a white man ministering in their midst. Opposition has come in the form of threats and through some attempts to discredit the ministry with the government. But God has protected His people and He has struck down the opposition again and again.

Sometimes that doesn’t happen in this life, of course. The priests at Nob were slaughtered by Saul, along with their families and animals. But they will be vindicated. They will rise again at the resurrection and will be openly vindicated on the Day of Judgment.

In the end, it is those who trusted in their own riches and who refused to make God their refuge who will be shown to be false and who will be ridiculed when everything they trust in turns to dust. But the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever, not only throughout all of this life, but even into eternity.

B. The Righteous, vv. 6-9

Contrasted with the futility and certain coming destruction of the evil is the security of the righteous.

I. Their Destiny, v. 6

The destiny of the righteous is that they will see the destruction of the wicked, will fear the Lord, and will laugh in joy at the downfall of their enemies. Now to us living in America in 2017, this language of laughing may seem harsh, but I suspect that is because we have never had death

squads come and kick down our doors and slaughter our families before our eyes. We have very little experience with truly violent evil opposition.

We do, however, have experience with evil opposition. Satan, our adversary the devil, roams about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour. The Judgment Day that is coming is, in fact, the final judgment of God against Satan. It is Satan and his demonic host who will be thrown into the lake of fire first. Then, all of those who followed them in their rebellion against God will follow them into eternal judgment.

The destiny of the enemy of our souls was sealed at the cross, when he was defeated, humiliated, cast down and disarmed. He still roams about the earth. He still deceives and torments, but he knows his days are numbered and it is our destiny to see our enemy condemned. While we are not to take vengeance into our own hands and while we are to forgive and seek to reconcile, we are also to trust God and to rejoice in His coming justice.

Romans 12:18-19 says, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’*” Our destiny is in the hands of God, and He will administer His justice on the Last Day.

2. Their Trust, v. 8

And so the trust of the righteous is strong, as seen in verse 8:

*But I am like a green olive tree
in the house of God.
I trust in the steadfast love of God
forever and ever.*

This is a picture of strength, stability, contentment and peace, which flows from trust in God’s steadfast love. Longwood Gardens has olive trees in part of their greenhouse, and they are so peaceful and beautiful. I have loved just being in that room and looking at them.

The world is full of chaos and confusion, evil and corruption, but if we will trust in the steadfast love of the Lord, we, too, will be like a green olive tree in the house of God. We will be steadfast and at peace in the midst of turmoil.

3. Their Words, v. 9

Just as the destiny and trust of the righteous is distinctly different from the wicked, so also are their words:

*I will thank you forever,
because you have done it.*

If the essence of the words of the ungodly is boasting, then the heart of the words of the righteous is thanksgiving. We do not boast in anything we have done, for we have done nothing. We boast in the Lord and we give thanks to Him forever, for He has done it all.

Jean Paul makes it very clear that he has not done anything in Haiti, and he is not doing anything in Haiti. It is the Lord who has done it all, who is doing it all and who will do all things according to His wisdom and for His glory. Again and again, we saw this: God does the work. We made our plans, but God changed our plans and did something better than we had planned. The things we thought would make a difference didn't matter in the end. Instead, the things we did not anticipate ended up being far more significant.

What can you do at the end of a mission trip where very little went as you had planned it, but you still had an amazing experience and saw God do great things? All we can do is give thanks and to realize that all of our lives are just like our mission trip: Things don't go according to our plan. They go according to God's plan, and that's so much better. So we give thanks to the Lord forever, because He is the One who has done it!

But David's faith is deeper still. He wasn't on a mission trip where he had an incredibly good time and where everything turned out great. He had just been the cause of the unjust slaughter of the priests of the Lord. Things hadn't gone according to his plan. From a human perspective, they were far worse, terribly worse. Yet still he says, "I will thank you forever, for you have done it."

If we cannot trust that we are in the hands of God and that He is good even when things go horribly wrong from our perspective, can we truly trust in Him and know that we are in His hands when things go right? We are always in His hands, He is always good. Whether we can see the good purpose for what He had ordained or not, we can still give thanks by faith and trust in the steadfast love of the Lord.

4. Their Love, vv. 1, 8, 9

This is where the righteous have set their love, on the love of the Lord, which is the good character of God:

*Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man?
The steadfast love of God endures all the day.*

*I trust in the steadfast love of God
forever and ever.*

*I will wait for your name, for it is good,
in the presence of the godly.*

Our hearts will center themselves on something. Something will be most central and most vital in our affections. It will either be the steadfast love of God, the One whose name is good, or else it will be something less, something temporary, something unreliable.

Living Life from the Inside Out and Upside Down

And this is the closing challenge for us: We live in a world that has been turned upside down by Satan and his lies. His strategy in the Garden of Eden was to lead an insurrection that would overturn the created order of God's good world. To a large measure, on a human level, he has succeeded. This world lives life upside down, taking temporary and ultimately worthless things to be things of eternal value. This is a temporary condition. Jesus will come again and turn everything right-side-up again. He has already begun to do so through the Gospel, through His kingdom.

So the question for us is this: Will we live like the upside-down world or like God's right-side-up kingdom? If the world is truly upside-down, then we cannot align ourselves with it. How do we know how we're aligned?

Well, what characterizes our words, boasting in what we have and what we have done or a continual thanksgiving to the God who does all things well?

What is at the center of our affections, our own selfish desires or the steadfast love of the Lord?

Do we live life as if we're in control, plotting and scheming how we can get our own way, or do we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us?

If we belong to God, and He has rescued us from condemnation by His grace, then He must be our center. His love must be our trust. His ways and His actions must prompt us to give thanks and wait upon Him. He is good, His love endures forever. He is the anchor for our souls. We will only see things as they really are when we are looking to Him!