

TRUTH B-P CHURCH
Adults Sunday School

PSALM 17 – GOD PROTECTS AS A FAIR JUDGE

I. INTRODUCTION

A Prayer of David. Could David been a man after God’s heart if he is not a man of prayer? A relationship can never be said to be intimate if there is no communication at all. We have the privilege to study the prayer of a man who had gone through much struggles in this world and how God truly protects him as fair Judge. This role which God assumes as a Judge, according to the psalmist in this psalm, clearly testified Him as a fair Judge to His own people, against His enemies, and also for His own people’s sake. May God help us as we take time to study this psalm for our encouragement.

It was not known at which point in David’s life was this psalm written. It was likely written after he became the king of Israel and he was under the threat of his enemy. Again, who exactly is this enemy is not known to us. But in such dangerous times, David did not succumb to fearing man. He did not forget God who is always near him. Instead he stays closer to God even more.

II. GOD PROTECTS AS A FAIR JUDGE TO HIS OWN PEOPLE

Verse 1, “Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.”

The psalmist appeals to God for help. And there are three imperatives that David used to seek the Lord.

Hear the right. David knew his theology well, especially the doctrine of prayer. God will not hear anyone who is still unregenerate and under the power of sin in bondage. Moreover David has not done anything wrong to justify why the enemies should come after him. In other words, he suffered wrong when the enemies are trying to destroy him.

Attend unto my cry. The word “attend” means to pay attention. David is pleading to God for His attention to his cry. It was a vocal prayer expressed in a loud and mournful manner, a cry of desperation, signifying the distress as well as the earnestness for help.

Give ear unto my prayer. This was a plea for God to incline His ear to hear his prayer. He does not want to take for granted that God is already hearing his prayer even before he cries out to Him. He sincerely and truly pleads the Lord to give him a listening ear because he needs it very much.

With these three imperatives, it emphasizes strongly how desperate the psalmist is before God in his circumstances. Not only the psalmist is realizing that he needs God’s protection immediately, he is literally entrusting his life into God’s good hand, revealing that without Him, he will surely perish. There is no way out except the way to God.

Feigned lips refer to lips of deceit, lies and hypocrisy. In other words, nothing is said out of sincerity and from the heart. For the psalmist, he is declaring that all that he cried before God came right from his heart. He truly poured out his heart to the Lord. There is no pretence at all.

Verse 2, “Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal.”

In this verse, the psalmist is asking the Lord to examine him carefully. Only the Lord's judgment is righteous, fair and just. And the psalmist is not afraid at all to let God judge him. By doing that, it means that whatever is inside that cannot be seen by men is seen clearly by the Lord. This is a very bold “challenge” to seek God's judgment upon self.

The word “sentence” means judgment. The psalmist is asking God for His judgment, not for others but for self. “Judge me” in other words. We see synonymous parallelism in this verse. The psalmist is seeking for God's fair and just judgment. The psalmist is not seeking God to show favour to him, but to be fair and just to him. If he is found guilty of any wrongdoing, he is willing to bear the consequences and be punished for it.

Verse 3, “Thou hast proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou hast tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.”

The word “proved” means to investigate or examine. The psalmist laid bare for the Lord to examine his heart. And indeed the Lord has done so as the psalmist has nothing to hide from Him, including his motives and intents of the heart and mind. The only way to do so is by the power of God's Word and His Holy Spirit. These are the two powerful weapons which God has blessed every true believer in Christ. With them, we can overcome the world, the devil and even our own pride, carnality and selfishness.

Night is almost always the time which sinful men chose to sin against God. Because it is dark, sinful men want his sinful pathway be covered up. But even then, the true believer who looks to the Lord is both strong in the day as well as in the night. God will empower him to overcome his own weaknesses so that he might not sin against Him. The word “visited” means to try and examine. God has examined the psalmist in the night which was supposed to be most vulnerable for sinful men. Thank God the psalmist's guard was up against any spiritual attack. And so the psalmist passed the test.

The word “tried” means to purge away using fire. In other words, the psalmist declares that he has been purged with fire by God. And there was nothing impure in him that was found to be burned up. There is no wood, hay or stubble in his life. And this is good news because it serves as a great testimony for other true believers in Christ. The reason is because this is very hard and rare to find. This opens up the hope that believers can live a victorious Christian life because God will help them achieve that end.

There was a strong determination in the psalmist that he made a bold claim, saying, “I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.” It does not matter how strong the enemy is or how difficult the circumstances have become, the psalmist has already given his word to be faithful to God. And he will not allow any falsehood, deceit, lies and hypocrisy to be part of him, not even a small part. And that would include any form of murmuring and complaint. He will not allow his mouth to transgress against God. Our mouth (which include both our lip and tongue) is one of the easiest part of our body can fall into sin and temptation.

Verse 4, “Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.”

It is just so easy to sin with our mouth if we do not make the effort to control it. Even the slightest slip can be disastrous for a child to follow bad and sinful example which he or she learn at home

from family, school, workplace or even in church. Without the Bible and the Holy Spirit, how will a believer keep sin away and grow spiritually?

The works of men refer to what the world would normally do. The norm of the day is to fight back or retaliate when someone falsely accused you of something which you did not do. Instead of overcoming evil with evil, you overcome evil with good which is what the psalmist had testified, "I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." The destroyer refers to a violent man. The violent man would be thrown into an uncontrolled rage and full of anger and hatred and is all ready to destroy. The psalmist chose to walk the other way, which is God's way.

Verse 5, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."

The psalmist indirectly acknowledging that left on his own, he will surely fall and sin against God. The whole action is to seek God for His protection. However His protection is effective towards them only when they learn to trust in Him and believe by faith all that the Bible has taught concerning our Christian faith.

The Christian walk is the walk according to God's way and direction. There is no good end if we choose to walk in our own path and not God's path. Even for paths and footsteps, we must realize that the unseen Guide is always there for us. We know which one we are to take and we make sure we will not fall. We need God's help and protection all the time. If not, we can easily let our feet end up somewhere outside of God's boundary of faith.

III. GOD PROTECTS AS A FAIR JUDGE AGAINST HIS ENEMIES

Verse 6, "I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech."

The psalmist is ready to begin his new cry against his enemies after calling upon God as a fair Judge against himself. Truly he has nothing to hide and therefore he is not afraid at all to stand before God in judgment. He knew that he has done nothing wrong to deserve any judgment from God from the standpoint of righteousness. The psalmist is not saying that he is sinless. He is saying that the trouble that he is facing from his enemy is not the result due to anything wrong done unto them. In fact, he has done nothing wrong against them. But they chose to be offended by him for whatever reason they might have.

The psalmist has the confidence that God will hear him and vindicate him accordingly. Yet he is not taking Him for granted. He still need to let faith takes the lead and everything in his life will fall into their place according to God's will. He continues to plead to God (by inclining His ear close to him) to hear him. And this time, it is a plea to judge against his enemies.

Verse 7, "Shew thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them."

There will be those who stand on the side of the Lord and those who prefer to stand against the Lord. As you look at this verse, to whom is the psalmist calling out to God to show His marvellous lovingkindness? Those whom He will save? Or those who rise up against God's people? Most commentators chose the latter. I believe it is to both at the same time.

To those who would be saved, they will be able to testify of God's marvellous lovingkindness that has been showered upon them. God's protection came at the right time that they might not be destroyed completely. They had learnt to trust in God for protection in the midst of trouble. And at

the same time, it serves as judgment against those who stand against God and His people. With God as their protection, they became absolutely helpless to carry out their evil plan. They simply are no match against God's infinite power and wisdom.

God's right hand is the sign of authority and approval upon those who trust in Him. The opposite is true. Those who go against God and His people, God will strike them with a deadly blow that there is no way they could even be able to escape from Him.

Verse 8, “Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings,”

Verse 8 is synonymous parallelism. The psalmist expressed his yearning to be God's beloved. That's what the apple of the eye means. Someone who is precious and valuable as the apple of the eye. The word keep means to protect. Truly God will protect His own whom He values and loves very much.

The shadow of thy wings refers to God's tender protection. The protection comes from someone who deemed you as most precious and valuable that no harm will ever befall on you. The word hide literally means to cover. God's protection comes as a cover over you so that no evil will fall on you. You are safely protected by divine intervention despite the dangerous situation.

Verse 9, “From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about.”

This is another synonymous parallelism. Where there is no enemy, there is no need of protection at all. But because the enemies are surrounding God's people, they certainly need God's protection. If not, they will be consumed by them. These enemies are described as wicked people. The word wicked describes those who are morally wrong and ungodly in all their ways. They hate the gospel light you are shining because it exposed their sins. Therefore they will oppress you. The word oppress means to ravage and make waste. They wanted to make you waste. They wanted you to be destroyed before their eyes.

Not only they are called wicked, they are also called deadly enemies. In other words, these enemies are out to destroy you completely. They are not contented to see you suffer a bit and then let you go. They wanted to see the end of you. They want to witness your hopeless end. These are the wicked and deadly enemies who are surrounding you all the time. God has a good purpose that you are put there in their midst. This good purpose is the glory of God that shines when God protects you from their wicked and deadly hands that seek to crush you completely. Because they will not succeed, it brings shame to them and you experience the victory and God's vindication, and for that you are encouraged.

Verse 10, “They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly.”

The psalmist gave us a glimpse of their physical condition. Inclosed in their own fat means they are rich and prosperous. The result of their prosperous condition leads to pride and they become boastful about it. From the spiritual standpoint, we see God's hand how they are being deceived by their own 'richness.' They thought they are doing the right thing since they are not 'punished' for their evil deeds. Instead they are doing so well to the envy of many. They become proud and even boastful of their wicked ways that lead to such “blessings.” But nothing can be further from the truth. They will realize in the end that they are actually in great spiritual poverty. The end result is everlasting torment in the Lake of Fire which is irreversible. It will be too late by then.

Verse 11, “They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth;”

These wicked people will not let God's people go. Since they are blinded, puffed up in own pride and with their hardness of heart against God, they will not stop destroying His people. Wherever we are, they are bound to follow. It is as if this is all that they are doing in life, just to make sure we are destroyed. They make it their aim to see that our life is filled with troubles just because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Setting their eyes bowing down to the earth indicates their aim and goal that makes them singlemindedly doing what they have set to do. By hook or by crook, they are determined to accomplish their evil desire.

Verse 12, “Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.”

The lion chewing its food will never share its portion with others. Once others tried to chew on the same portion, it will be aroused and roared with loud roar in order to frighten off the rest. For the sake of filling the hunger desire, the young lion is patient enough to wait till the opportune time to catch the prey and consume it. It may be hiding in the secret places (places where it cannot be easily seen) for a long time and then slowly and quietly drew near the prey. And then suddenly when it reached the distance close enough, it suddenly pounded upon the prey as a surprise, but it will be too late for the prey to escape. And that is the end for the prey but the effort of the young lion in patience paid off. That's how evil men being used by Satan will approach God's people. If it takes 10 years to cause God's people to fall, Satan and his followers are patient enough to wait that long, no matter what it takes, to do it. And we, knowing the deception and tricks of the Devil, must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, by drawing near to God for He will protect us and lead us to safety.

We have covered how God protects as a fair Judge to His own people and as a fair Judge against the enemies. Finally in this psalm, we see how God protects as a fair Judge for His people's sake. This is a comfort to all of us who are on the Lord's side. For He is on our side.

IV. GOD PROTECTS AS A FAIR JUDGE FOR HIS OWN PEOPLE

Verse 13, “Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword:”

Truly we must know which side we belong to: God's side or the Devil's side? If we say we are on the Lord's side, then are we following Him in His commandment and fulfilling His will for us in this life? If we are, then we know that God will never disappoint us at all. He will protect us and He will surely punish those who go against Him.

Now the psalmist gathered his boldness and courage before the Lord and pleaded before Him to arise. What does it mean to arise? It means that the Lord is going to take action now. It is not going to be passive anymore but active, and made known to all. There are two actions which the psalmist implored the Lord to do:

Disappoint him. It means to prevent the enemy from achieving his end. Just when the enemy is about the strike, the Lord came in time to prevent that from happening. It is not wrong for the psalmist to make such a request to the Lord. The psalmist does not want the enemy to succeed in his evil way. He wants to be protected. This is a sincere and humble cry to the Lord.

Cast him down. It means to bend down to the knees. This is humbling the enemy to such that they lie flat with their face down to the ground. Who can succeed in reducing the enemies to such a surrendered state? Only God!

The “wicked” here refers to God's sword. What the psalmist is saying is that the one who wields the sword is in control. In any case, God is the One who is holding the sword. He is in total control of the sword. The sword cannot do anything without Him giving instruction and permission.

Verse 14, “From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.”

Not only the wicked is God's sword, men of the world are God's hand. What does it mean? It means that God is in control of them as He controls His own hand. His people will not be well protected if not for His sovereign control.

Men of the world would include their carnality, worldliness, selfishness, and all their ungodly ways. They are men who have wealth and power, they have their portion in this life (refers to their inheritance), hid treasure in their belly (refers babies who are conceived in the womb), full of children (since there is no light at home, the children were wayward and inheritance left to them would soon be wasted or be used in ungodliness which God hates).

Verse 15, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

The life of an ungodly man is a wasted life no matter how much good he had brought to the society. It is displeasing in the eyes of God. But for a believer whose life is patterned after holiness and godliness is a different and better life. Simply because it is a life that is well pleasing before God. The psalmist is living such a beautiful life with God.

He declared, “As for me...” This is contrasting what he had said in the preceding verses about the wicked. For the psalmist, he is walking in total opposite direction from them. He declared he beholds the face of God in righteousness. This is a metaphor, describing how the psalmist is walking in the presence of God in righteousness. He enjoys doing the right things before God. And he knew that this is what God wants and desires of him. He will not want to do anything that is against Him.

The Lord's desire is the psalmist's satisfaction. This is completely giving self to God. It is a self-less giving to God and entirely up to Him what He wants to do with his life. And this is not saying that he is doing it unwillingly or grudgingly. No, not at all! He is doing this loving acts from his heart and he patterns himself after his likeness. He wants to be perfect as God is perfect. He wants to be holy as God is holy. Indeed all those who are named the name of Christ, shall be like Him when we see Him face to face in glory. May we be found faithful unto the end. Amen.