

Psalm 52

Our psalm this morning is unusual in one key way, it doesn't address God. This psalm is addressed to an evil man. It serves as a challenge to a wicked person regarding his wicked life and the future he might expect. At the same time, it is written from the perspective of a righteous man who suffers because of the actions of this wicked man.

This psalm is in response to a man named Doeg who was the head shepherd for King Saul. The story can be found in 1 Samuel chapters 21-22. These chapters record a time when David had to flee from Saul who was determined to kill him. As he fled, he stopped by a place called Nob and asked Ahimelech for supplies—Ahimelech was the priest at Nob which was a center of worship at that time. This man Doeg, an Edomite, saw David there and later reported it to Saul. Saul had Doeg kill the priests and then he went on to kill every man, woman, and child in Nob because David had found help there.

Today's psalm addresses a difficulty many people of faith have in reconciling their own theological understanding with the world as they experience it - the fact that the powerful often seem to act in ways that are in opposition to virtue. The answer offered may not be greatly comforting, but something about it is genuinely human and authentic to the experience of the psalmist and his community, and authentic to the experience of any of us who have suffered.

What we find in this psalm is two contrasting ways of doing life - the way of destruction and the way of flourishing.

David remembers his enemy Doeg as a perfect example of the way of destruction. He was proud and used his words and sword to slaughter an entire town of innocents in the hope of promotion.

He is a schemer and schemers like Doeg love evil more than good. They prefer lies to truth, and rely on destroying others to promote themselves. He cared about one person only and that was himself.

Today we face our own Doegs in government. People who only care about themselves - enriching themselves, maintaining power, and most disturbing of all, seem to thrive off of cruelty. Lives are being uprooted and people are suffering cruelty at the hands of ICE agents, guards at the concentration camps, at the hands of other countries who also thrive on cruelty.

The relentless day after day of bad news can not only affect one's mental health, but one's faith as well. Yet despite Saul's attempts to kill David, despite the cruelty of Doeg against the people of Nob, David's faith rises up.

The beginning verses of the psalm state what kind of person Doeg is.

Why do you boast, O might one, of mischief done against the godly?

All day long you are plotting destruction. Your tongue is like a sharp razor, you worker of treachery.

You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking the truth. You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.

It seems that the traits of an evil one have never changed throughout the centuries - lying, devouring, plotting destruction - and innocent people continue to suffer.

But then comes the shift in the psalm. Despite there having been multiple attempts made to have him killed, David finds himself

stating what God will do against this wicked man and he is still able to declare that God is good and will be the victor.

And unlike David, this is where many people would find themselves losing faith, unable to see God as good, as victorious. It is challenging to keep seeing God as good when there are young girls drowning, children dying of preventable diseases in Africa, people dying in wars, suffering caused by the government that is supposed to be there to provide and protect them. How is God's goodness displayed in all of this cruelty and destruction?

But there is a difference between what God allows in a fallen, sinful, wicked world and what God enjoys. God doesn't enjoy any death, sickness, or destruction, especially when it is one of his beloved children destroying another one of His beloved children. God mourns. God weeps. And God will ultimately judge. And God helps us through these difficult times when we rely on Him.

As David shifts his attention from the wicked to the Lord, he makes a provocative statement of his confidence in God: "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God". In verse 5, David warns the evildoer that God "will uproot you from the land of the living." Yet David is like a green olive tree. The olive tree is a strong tree that thrives despite the dry and barren conditions it exists in. Like the olive tree, David is stable and secure. And, of course, the olive tree is found in the House of God. The tree is made strong because it resides in the house of God. David was safe and secure because he lived in the presence of God.

What are the trials, troubles, and tribulations you face? No matter what is going on in your life or in the world around you, you can face them like a green olive tree in the house of God. Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, focus on God and not on your circumstances. Live with assurance that God is always present, actively in charge, and dynamically at work.

So some of the things we can do to be like a green olive tree in the House of God?

First, **trust in the Lord**. David declares, “I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever” (Psalm 52b). To trust in the Lord is to live in dependence, reliance, and confidence in the Lord. This is the only way to face evil, injustice, and wickedness. You must trust in the Lord. The Lord is worthy of your trust, because of his “steadfast love.”

God’s love is volitional, not emotional. God loves us because he has promised to love us and God always keeps his promises. God’s love is loyal. When others turn against you, God’s love remains steadfast. For that matter, when you turn from God to go your own way, his love remains steadfast. For this reason, it is good and right and wise to trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

Second, **Thank the Lord**. David testifies, “I will thank you forever, because of what you have done” (Psalm 52:9a). Thanksgiving to God is clear evidence of trust in God. A life of worry, doubt, and fear betrays a lack of confidence in God. Trust in God’s future faithfulness is rooted in gratitude for God’s past faithfulness. What God has already done is a resume for what he will do. Thanksgiving fuels trust.

In the midst of trouble, you may be tempted to ask, “What do I have to thank God for?” But that’s the wrong question. your focus should be on the source, not the channel. David sang, “I will thank you forever, because **you** have done it.” His focus was on who did it, not what was done. This focus on the Lord enabled him to give thanks in the trials he faced.

And third we must **wait on the Lord**. Psalm 27 tells us: “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the

Lord.” And Psalm 37 says: “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the one who carries out evil devices.” And finally from Micah: “But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.” A trusting and thankful heart will be marked by patience. This patience is not about sitting down and waiting. To wait on the walk is to walk by faith, not by sight. You walk behind the Lord, expecting God to lead you. You do not run ahead of God, taking matters into your own hand.

Waiting can be so hard when things seem to be crumbling around you, but that is why we need to do all of these things: Trust in God, thank God, and Wait on God. If we practice trusting and thanking God, then the waiting will become a bit easier to do.

David’s expectations had not been fulfilled yet, but he hoped in the Lord, waiting on God to keep his promises. David was able to wait patiently, for the Lord is good. We would do well to remember that God IS a good God who always keeps his promises. Wait for God! But don’t wait alone. God made us in community for many reasons and one reason is that God wanted us to wait on Him with other godly people who are also waiting upon the Lord. So trust in the Lord, give thanks to God, and then wait on God. God is always faithful and can always be depended upon. His love endures forever. Amen.

