

## Confidence in Prayer

Psalm 5

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Did you hear about the secret service agent who tried to sneak his wife onto Air Force One (the President's jet) last week? It's kind of a crazy story and sounds like something out of a novel. I'm not sure what his motives were. Perhaps she wanted to meet the president or just a free trip to the UK. Needless to say, it didn't work. She didn't get on Air Force One.

You and I would probably not get an audience with the President of the United States, much less get on the plane. I don't believe that if you email Trump or even J. D. Vance, your email would make it past security. What's interesting is that these are people who have power and make decisions that affect our lives in many different ways, and yet we can't get in the room with them to discuss these decisions. The bottom line is that when it comes to the places of human power and authority where significant decisions are made, no one hears us when we cry out.

Yet, here's an amazing thought: Without even rising from where we are seated at this moment, we can speak with the King of Kings and LORD of Lords. We can talk to the One, at this very moment, who made this world and runs it. As a matter of fact, since we have been in this worship service, we have been talking to Him. He has heard every word we have said. He knows us, understands us, cares for us, and is always near us. He is never too busy or too distracted or so disappointed in us that He will not hear our cry for help, grace, and mercy.

We may not be heard in the halls of human power, but in the court of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the One who created and runs the universe, we are always heard by our Savior. He welcomes us in and wants us to talk to Him.

One of the beautiful aspects of the Psalms is that they are a school for learning how to pray. They teach us how to pray and talk to God in all kinds of ways, circumstances, and situations. This morning, we find one more of the nuanced ways to talk to our God. In Psalm 5, King David opens up his journal and lets us hear his heart as he wrote this prayer to God.

In Psalm 5, David asks God to rescue him from his enemies. We're not sure of the circumstances in his life for this Psalm. We don't have any historical information. Some scholars believe that this Psalm should be coupled with Psalm 4 because Psalm 4 is considered an evening prayer, and Psalm 5 is a morning prayer. Whatever the situation was, King David was confident that God would hear his prayer and help him. In Psalm 5, we hear David's confidence in prayer as he leans into his covenant relationship with Yahweh.

Psalm 5 teaches us *how to pray with confidence, knowing that because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection from the dead, the LORD hears our prayers*. So, we can pray with confidence, conviction, and with contentment because of Jesus' work on our behalf.

This Psalm breaks down into five stanzas, but I will use three points of application to work through Psalm 5.

### I. Pray with covenant confidence (vv. 1-3, 7-8)

Look at vv. 1-3:

*Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning. <sup>2</sup> Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray. <sup>3</sup> O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.*

In v. 1, we find King David calling out to the Lord almost in desperation. He cries out, asking Him to listen to his words and listen to his groanings. If you notice, in v. 1, the word *LORD* is in all caps. This means in the original Hebrew text, the word is Yahweh. Yahweh is God's covenant name, as opposed to using other titles/names like *Adonia* for Lord or *Elohim* for God.

What this means is that David began his prayer, leaning into his covenant relationship with God. He used God's personal name, which is grounded in the covenant that He had made with the people of Israel through Abraham, Moses, and eventually with David in 2 Samuel.

Last Sunday, Pastor Dean referred to King David's "*covenant confidence in prayer*." He's right! This is what we find here in Psalm 5. In v. 1, we hear David's covenant confidence in prayer.

David's covenant confidence is a redemptive thread woven into the fabric of his relationship with God. The covenant he was resting in was established with Abraham in Genesis 15. Then the covenant found fuller revelation in Exodus. However, at the burning bush<sup>1</sup>, God told Moses His covenant name was – *Yahweh*. Then in 2 Samuel 7:8-16, Yahweh establishes His covenant with David. Listen to a portion of the covenant.

*'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup> And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. . . <sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'* "

It is essential to understand that David presses into this redemptive covenant. He leans into the unmerited saving grace of God given to him when he asks Yahweh to listen to his *words* that he calls *groanings*.

Then in v. 2, David doubles down and cries out for his King and his God to pay attention to what he is praying. Finally, in v. 3, it is as if He reminds the LORD that his prayer is not a "*one-off prayer*" but that he continually comes to Him in the morning with his request.

Did you notice that David repeated the phrase "*in the morning*" twice in one sentence? This tells us he had arranged his life so that he could continually come to God in prayer at the beginning of every day. He would pray and wait for Yahweh to answer. David was looking for God's answer in expectant faith.

Let's think about how to apply these three verses. How's your prayer life going? David prayed persistent prayers with confidence based on God's covenant with him. Do you do that? Do you understand how to pray persistent prayers based on covenant confidence?

First, there is no law saying you must pray in the mornings, but doesn't it make sense to talk to God in prayer the first thing every morning? It just makes sense to talk to your Redeemer, Provider, Protector, and Guide before you start each day.

Second, this doesn't mean your prayers have to be technically correct or orderly. Covenant confidence in prayer doesn't come from being a gifted speaker. David called his prayer – "*groanings*." The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:26 that sometimes *we don't know what to pray and the Spirit prays for us with groanings too deep for words*. Sometimes, all we can do is come before the Lord and groan. Have you ever felt unsure about what to pray or struggled to find the right words?

Third, covenant confidence in prayer DOES mean we understand that Jesus is the One who makes prayers effective. Jesus does this through His sinless life, substitutionary death on the cross to pay for our sins, and the victory He won when He was raised from the dead. Now, by our faith in Him, we can stand before God justified and counted righteous because we stand before Him "*in Christ*."

We don't look back at the Old Covenant with Abraham, Moses, and David, but we look to covenant fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant and established the New Covenant in His blood so that we may come boldly to the throne of grace because, as the writer of Hebrews says:

*But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.*<sup>2</sup>

This means we can come in covenant confidence before God, knowing that it is not in our righteousness that we come before Him but in Christ's righteousness. Now, because of Christ, we can pray fervent, persistent, confident prayers in Jesus' name.

This leads us to vv. 7-8, where we learn of more covenant-confident prayers. Listen to David's words:

*But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you. <sup>8</sup> Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me.*

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 3.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 8:6

The phrase “*your steadfast love*” is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which means *Yahweh’s covenant love*. He calls on God’s covenant faithfulness to him to give him confidence that he can come into God’s presence in prayer.

For Christians, the situation is the same, except that the covenant is fulfilled in Jesus, the True and Better David. Jesus fulfilled the covenant requirements and bought the prayers of God’s people by His blood that was shed on the cross.

Friends, our prayers to God are blood-bought gifts, paid for by the blood of Jesus. So, when Jesus purchased His saints, He also purchased their prayers.

This is why we usually end our prayers “*in Jesus’ name*.” It is because He is the One who makes our prayers acceptable to the Lord. We don’t pray in our names or our righteousness but in Jesus’ name and righteousness.

As I said, we often end our prayers, “*in Jesus’ name*.” But you know what I like to do? I like to pray backwards. Sometimes, I begin my prayers by saying, “*LORD, we come to You in Jesus’ name*.” By doing this, I remind myself that I am not coming into the presence of God by my righteousness but in Christ’s righteousness.

I will begin my prayer by saying, “*Father, I come to You in Jesus’ name*.” It is a subtle reminder that I stand in God’s presence not because of my righteousness, and that my prayers are blood-bought gifts from God, so I need to be sure to pray according to God’s will and not my own.

Finally, we come full circle in v. 8. Here David prays that the Lord will do for him what we found in Psalm 1, that God would lead him in the way of the righteous.

As you read this Psalm, have you noticed how David’s confidence grew as he prayed. He went from cries and groaning to wanting to walk in righteousness and do God’s will no matter the cost. This is what happens when we pray in covenant confidence.

David’s prayer changed from groaning to asking the Lord to prepare him for the battle that lies ahead. He knew his enemies would make it difficult to follow God. He anticipated the seduction to succumb to sin. So, he made up his mind early that when he was tempted, Yahweh would cause him to be obedient and make him walk in righteousness.

Brothers and sisters, the only way to be led in righteousness is to have Jesus’ righteousness. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says,

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Now, by the person and work of Jesus, we can confidently bring our prayers to God and boldly ask Him to help us and even cause us to walk in the righteousness of Jesus. Do you pray this way? Do you base your prayers on the righteousness of Christ or your own efforts that you somehow deserve to be heard because you’ve been good, or went to church, or gave a tithe, or did a good deed?

Friends, our righteousness is counted as filthy rags. Our righteousness will not earn a hearing with God. You can’t sneak into God’s presence with your righteousness. You must receive the righteousness of Christ by turning from your sin and placing your faith in Jesus’ perfect life, substitutionary death for you, and by His resurrection from the dead. This is our covenant confidence, which we can rely on when we pray.

Friends, this is such good news when you have had a rotten week that you can come to God in prayer knowing that you have failed miserably and yet God will listen to your prayers because you come in Jesus’ righteousness and not your own. Most of the time, this is the battle we face when we pray. Brothers and sisters, our covenant confidence in prayer is that Jesus is our righteousness. He is the One who fulfilled the covenant for us so that we can come boldly before the throne of God in our times of need.

## II. Pray with covenant conviction (vv. 4-6, 9-10)

*For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. <sup>5</sup> The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. <sup>6</sup> You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.*

In v. 4, David reminds us that the Lord doesn’t delight in wickedness and that evil may not be in His presence. I want you to notice that v. 4 is addressing the opposite of righteousness, which is grounded in covenant confidence that we just looked at in the preceding verses. David has flipped his prayer around and is showing us the other side of the coin.

In v. 4, David is addressing those who reject the covenant of the LORD and reject His Kingship over their lives. They were people who took pleasure in evil and cherished sin in their hearts. They were people who lived with God's people and dwelt in the Promised Land. They pretended to live in covenant with God, but they deceitfully practiced wickedness.

Then in v. 5, David continues to pile it on when he says the boastful shall not stand before your eyes and that God hates all evildoers! He is telling us that arrogant people will not be in the presence of God. Scripture is clear – God hates pride.

However, the last part of v. 5 is the shocker for our modern ears.

*“God hates all evildoers.”*

How do I reconcile “*God hates all evildoers*” with “*For God so loved the world.*” How do I reconcile this with the call by Christ to love my enemies?

Friends, we need to take v. 5 seriously. We cannot dismiss this verse as merely an Old Testament verse that somehow suggests the God of the Old Testament held this view, and by the time the New Testament arrived, He had softened His stance on evil and evildoers. He hasn't, and He will not.

Friends, the last part of v. 5 emphasizes the actions and behaviors of wicked people. Listen, God loves human beings because they are created in His image. However, when people begin to function as workers of evil and carry out wickedness, God has nothing but wrath and righteous anger toward them. Pastor Sam Storms says,

*Have you considered that to pray ‘Thy kingdom come’ (Matt. 6:10) is to invoke divine judgment on all other kingdoms and all those who oppose the reign of God?<sup>3</sup>*

If we want to see God's position on evil and evildoers, all we need to do is look at the cross of Christ. This kind of wrath and judgment that was poured out on Jesus is what awaits all who reject the substitutionary atonement of Christ.

To soften the wrath of God against sin by saying God changed His position on sin in the New Testament is to cheapen the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. God does hate evil and evildoers. He will judge sinners who do not repent of their sin.

Finally, in v. 6, the intensification of God's anger toward sin continues to grow. Scripture interprets Scripture – Right? Verse 6 helps us make sense of v. 5. God sees into the hearts of sinners. There are the vessels of wrath that God has created.<sup>4</sup>

It is for God to make these final judgments on sinners and not us. God will judge and punish evil and sinners in the end. He knows the end of all people from the beginning. However, God hasn't given us that information. Instead, we are called to love and serve our enemies. We are called to proclaim the gospel to them. We are called to leave the final judgment of sinners in God's hands.

This means we should pray in humility and confidence and thank God for saving us, not of our own merit, but by His grace. This means we can pray for the salvation of those who are lost, evil, and committing evil acts, and at the same time, we can ask God to bring justice on all those who commit these sins.

Which leads us to vv. 9-10. First, let's look at v. 9:

*For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.*

The Apostle Paul quotes v. 9 in Romans 3:10-18 as he gave a long list of sins that God's people had committed. Paul's point is that we are all sinners and unless we repent, we will be judged. As Paul went on to say, no one is righteous. So, as I just said, we must recognize that we were once lost and living in sin, and by God's marvelous grace, He has saved us not because we are worthy or earned it but because of His rich mercy.

However, we must put this Psalm in its proper context. We must consider the weight of David's prayer. David's prayer is not against people who were minor annoyances and irritations to him. No! It was directed toward his enemies. David's prayer is a cry for justice. It is a prayer against people who were carrying out wickedness. They were evil oppressors of him and of God's people.

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<sup>3</sup> Sam Storms, *Those Troubling Psalms of Imprecation*.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 9-11.

He says the “mouths” of these particular evildoers are like *an open grave with rotting flesh in it that gives off a vile stench*. It is actually unhealthy to be near them. Death is in their heart, and their words are destructive. Yet, the death and destruction of their words are hidden like land mines. These people flattered with soft voices and smooth words. They plan to seduce and oppress their victims.

The picture of the wicked is so disgusting to King David that in v. 10, he prays that God would “cast them out” of the promised land. David wants God to remove the evil oppressors from among God’s people. Listen to what he says in v. 10:

*Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you.*

I love what Pastor Dane Ortlund says about this verse. He writes:

*Christian Scriptures are not abstract or ethereal. [They are not] disconnected from the visceral emotions and experiences of life in a fallen world. The Bible is concrete, tangible, and rooted in gritty reality.<sup>5</sup>*

Remember, David is groaning in these verses. He is asking God to judge the wicked for the evil they have done against God’s people. They have intentionally harmed and abused the covenant people of God.

These are strong words coming from the King, and the language of Psalm 5 may sound harsh and uncompassionate to our modern ears, but David knows who God is. He is a righteous God, and for sin to go unpunished would undermine the very nature and character of God.<sup>6</sup>

So, how do these verses apply to us? How can we pray with covenant conviction?

First, it is not uncompassionate for us to ask God to administer justice against evil and evildoers. There is real evil in the world, and it is not wrong to pray against it and ask God to act. It is not a spirit of vengefulness that prays this way, but one who yearns for the glory of God. We should long for God to bring holiness and justice to the earth. We pray and we ask God to act, and then we rest in the truth that, in His time, God will act according to His divine nature and holy character by administering divine justice.

Second, as we learned in Psalm 1, there are only two ways to live. We live in covenant with God through Christ, whereby Jesus fulfilled the covenant by paying for our sins on the cross, or we bear the consequences of our sin.

In the words of v. 10, all the evil that you had done was imputed to Jesus, and He was “cast out” of God’s presence because of your sin, so that by your faith in Him, you would not be “cast out.”

However, if you live your life rejecting Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for you, in the end, you will be “cast out” of God’s presence. There will be no hope left for you, for you will be cast into Hell to pay for your sins for all eternity.

Friends, Jesus is the True and Better David, who prayed this prayer before He was crucified. He prayed it, knowing that for all who come to Him in faith and repentance, the justice they deserve would fall on Him because He would bear the guilt of all evildoers who come to Him seeking refuge.

Finally, our covenant conviction in prayer is that God will one day call all into account. He will administer justice in righteousness. No one will escape, and all will be made right. This leads us to our last point in vv. 11-12.

### III. Pray with covenant contentment (vv. 11-12)

*But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. <sup>12</sup> For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.*

King David prayed his prayer and then directed his heart back to God to find contentment in Him. He was satisfied to leave justice and the punishment of the evildoers in God’s hands. He didn’t allow discontentment to fester in his heart. He determined to rest in God’s providence and find his refuge in Him. He knew that God would make all things right, and so he could rejoice in that.

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<sup>5</sup> Dane Ortlund, *In the Lord I Take Refuge*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, can you rest in God's plan to judge the evil and evildoers? Can you rest and rejoice in Him even though He may not carry out the plan you desire and carry it out on your timetable?

Finally, brothers and sisters in Christ, are you groaning because of the injustice that has been done to you today? We have a Savior who knows what it is like to groan over injustice, sin, and pain. He groaned on the cross so that every groan we experience may be used for our good and His glory. This means that when we are groaning in weakness because of the injustice done to us, because of what Jesus did for us on the cross and by His resurrection from the dead, we can confidently come to Him and plead for justice and strength to endure.