



Nuremberg Square, Germany, January 2020

The Big Idea:

David pours out his heart to God for his mistreatment by the sins of others, settles justice, and leaves satisfied.

Context: There are five psalms like this one that are classified as “prayers.” This is us reading David’s journal as he pours out raw, honest prayer to his Father and Friend, not in song this time but in rich word (Kidner p53).

Summary of Psalm 17: In Part 1, David opens his soul to God’s searchlight as he tells God the pain he feels from others’ sinful actions towards him. In Part 2, David prays for justice to be done, and he realizes that he is not fit to seek vengeance as he is not qualified to be the holy and perfect judge that only God is. Instead of wallowing in bitterness, David is left satisfied because he personally has and knows the all-satisfying, all-beautiful, all-consuming, all-protecting God as his very own. He has “more than enough.”

Learn the nuances of lament.

Bringing prayers of lament for grief can be a different lament than for betrayal. These are two of the main subsets of the broader category of lament. “The Bible forbids us to use a single template for handling pain and grief, but modern people tend to be more reductionist.

There are four main kinds of suffering:

1. Jonah, David, and the Suffering We Bring on Ourselves (see book for detail). So there is suffering caused by bad behavior.

2. Paul, Jeremiah, and the Suffering of Betrayal: But, then, there is the suffering caused by good and brave

Psalm 17: David Laments for Justice.

PART 1: David opens himself to God’s scrutiny.

I. The appeal to truth: David appeals to the integrity of truth.

1 Hear a just cause¹, O LORD;

attend to my cry!

Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!

2 From your² presence let my vindication³ come!

Let your eyes behold the right!

3 You have tried⁴ my heart,
you have visited me by night,
you have tested me,

¹ “Just cause” - not perfection: God uses similar language himself on Job without implying his sinlessness or perfection; v5 my feet have not slipped (Kidner Classic Commentaries, Psalm 1-72, Derek Kidner, IVP Academic Press, reprint 2014, p104): “And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” - Job 1:8

² David believes in faith that vengeance is not his. He rests in God doing his work better than he can. This is like what God told Job: you are not qualified to be the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good judge - you do not know all I know. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. - Job 38:4

³ David prays that his name be cleared.

⁴ This continues the thought in Psalm 16: God is working on us while we sleep and are in bed. “I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. - Psalm 16:7

behavior... When someone perceives that they have been wronged by you, they may embark on a program of trying to hurt you or damage your reputation. Often someone you thought you knew well can turn on you and attack you because it furthers their career or interests. Personal betrayals are particularly horrific, and this sort of trial can tempt you to give in to debilitating anger and bitterness. While the first kind of suffering requires that you learn repentance, this kind of suffering will entail that you wrestle with the issues of forgiveness.

3. Mary, Martha, and the Suffering of Loss;

4. Job and the Suffering of Mystery.” (source: Tim Keller, Walking with God through Pain & Suffering).

DA Carson devotional commentary on this Psalm, For the Love of God:

“These are all important lessons, repeated, in whole or in part, many times in the Bible. Thus we find the apostle Paul telling the Roman believers, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay’ [Deut. 32:35], says the Lord” (Rom. 12:17-19, italics added). This is a lesson believers must constantly relearn and apply to themselves. It is easy enough to absorb it when things are going well. But when church members are unfairly attacking your ministry, when gossips are undermining your position in the company for their own advantage, when colleagues in the university department invariably attach the ugliest motives to everything you say and do—that is the test for leaving things in the hands of the God whose care for his own and whose passion

and you will find nothing⁵;

I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.

4 With regard to the works of man,
by the word⁶ of your lips

I have avoided the ways of the violent.

5 My steps have held fast to your paths;
my feet have not slipped.

PART 2: David calls for protection from God.

II. The appeal to love: David pleas as to a friend and protector, not as in a case presented to a judge (Kidner 104).

6 I call upon you⁷,
for⁸ you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me;
hear my words.

7 Wondrously⁹ show your steadfast love, O Savior
of those
who seek refuge from their adversaries
at (with) your right hand.

⁵ David has asked for the all-seeing eyes of God to inspect him and brings all to him. There is a claim of Innocence. These verses amplify the assertion of innocence (the claim begins in v. 1, “lips free of deceit”). The singer has opened himself to the Lord’s examination (tried, visited, tested), and he recounts his efforts to stay pure (purposed, avoided, steps have held fast, feet have not slipped) (ESV Study Bible Notes).

⁶ Because of God’s promises and word, we have real hope which gives real reason not to repay evil with evil.

⁷ We see the pattern here of the gospel third way: don’t stuff your emotions, don’t blow in anger, but be raw and unpremeditated in talking to God himself. He is safe. He wants these prayers from his people.

⁸ Why does he call upon God? Answer: he knows he will answer him.

⁹ Verse 7 is only four highly charged Hebrew words: “Wonderously show” is the same word in Genesis 18:14 when God speaks over barren Sara to bear Isaac saying, “Is anything too wonderful (literally) for God? “Steadfast love” is that faithfulness to a covenant, and marriage give us insight by it being a living parable.

for justice ensure final vindication. And such faith brings us relief from stress: “And I—in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness” (17:15).”

How is David satisfied? By the end of this prayer, David does not see his name restored or his enemies’ final judgment for their wrong. But by faith he believes in the God of justice. God is what, or “who”, satisfies him. David says “As for me, I will be satisfied with more than enough with all that you are for me, God.” We see what David only dreamt about. Because Christ became the curse for me outside the city for my sins, I can forgive others and leave room for the vengeance of God in his hands (vs13-14). We get intimate, all-satisfying friendship / relationship with the Almighty God today by the Spirit of Christ and one day eternally face-to-face (vs15).

What is the connection between Job and David in this Psalm (see Job notes below)? David leaves the judgment of his enemies and pursuers with God, who has more knowledge than David does to be the qualified judge. Just like Job, David was not there at the foundation of the earth and does not know all that God knows. In verse 13 David prays, “you” act not me acting in vengeance taking matters into my own hands.

At this point in David’s life, there is no indication that things will ever be made just with King Saul and stopping his murderous intent over David. He does not know the “rest of the story” like we do today, when David does become King. He has an opportunity to serve God for God, not for what God gives him or can make him. He does not abandon God over Satan’s charge to God over Job: he only serves you because you bless him.

8 Keep me as the apple of your eye¹⁰;
hide me in the shadow of your wings,
9 from the wicked who do me violence,
my deadly enemies who surround me.

III. The lust to kill: David reflects on others’ lust to slander and destroy.

10 They close¹¹ their hearts to pity;
with their mouths they speak arrogantly¹².
11 They have now surrounded¹³ our¹⁴ steps;
they set their eyes to cast us to the ground.
12 He is like a lion eager to tear,
as a young lion lurking in ambush.

David laments the real wrong he has experienced, leaves justice in God’s hands, and ends ultimately with “I get God - when I awake, I will be satisfied with your likeness!” He experiences intimate fellowship with God like Job does with Yahweh from the whirlwind.

¹⁰ Literally the pupil: verse 8 connects both metaphors in a pair - “apple of eye” and “shelter of wings” - just like in Deuteronomy 32:10-11. It conveys deep affection, and strong protection and training by God as his own.

¹¹ The literal Hebrew translates this “they closed their fat”. “...probably refers to their literal appearance, which told its own tale of self-love, faithfully reflecting their inward state (cf. Psalm 119:70, ‘their heart is gross like fat’)... The former translation, which seems slightly less forced, makes the callousness a gradual growth; the latter makes is a conscious choice. Either process, is of course, all too possible” (Kidner p105).

¹² Instead of empathy and honor there is no pity and there is arrogance.

¹³ This is a study in heartlessness of a predator: “The ugly scene of encirclement reappears in 22:12-18 in a form which shows where is logically ends: at Calvary” (Kidner p105). It’s what they did to Christ.

¹⁴ David interchanges singular and plural pronouns: “David’s companions are never far from his thoughts, and the enemy likewise is not plural, now singular” (Kidner 106). Verse 12 is the enemy acting singularly.

This type of lament David walks through follows the same pattern that God taught Job: Tim Keller Podcast #417 My Servant Job.

Job, after suffering the loss of all his children, wealth, health, and the betrayal of his friends, asks God two questions: he wants an EXPLANATION why he suffered, and he wants VINDICATION that the slanders of his name were wrong, namely, that he did not bring this suffering on himself because of some hidden sin as his friends argued.

God gives three responses to Job:

1. You do not have the knowledge I have. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? - Job 38:2 God created the world in all its intricacies in the galaxies. We are not qualified to judge because we do not have his knowledge. "There are indeed reasons beyond what you can know, Job, because I am God and you are not. You are like the seven year old boy saying to the physicist that there is no way that the multi-ton rocket will fly."

2. He does not tell Job WHY he suffered. There is no indication that Job ever knew of Satan's conversation with God in Job chapters 1-2; else he would have served God for nothing like Satan said. Do we love God for what he brings or do we just love him? He never sees what we see in chapters 1-2, he just loves God for God. Salvation is not by works so that God then owes us a life of no pain. Salvation is of grace. It is wrong to love someone for what they give you instead of just who they are.

3. Job gets communion with Yahweh. God shows up in a hurricane force tempest. From the whirlwind God speaks to Job with the covenant keeping, personal name of God -

IV. The rewards of lust: The rewards of the disobedient are two-fold - God halting their behavior and heaping on them the very things they love more than him.

13 Arise¹⁵, O LORD!

Confront¹⁶ him,

subdue him!

Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword,

14 from men by your hand, O LORD,

from men of the world

whose portion¹⁷ is in this life.

You fill their womb with treasure;

they are satisfied with children,

and they leave their abundance to their infants.



¹⁵ David leaves the method of defeat up to God: May God Defeat Them! In such an environment of threat and faith, the proper recourse is prayer for the enemy's defeat. Though their repentance may be preferred, that avenue seems closed (v. 10), and thus deliverance for the pious requires defeat for the attacker. The specific kind of defeat is left up to God (ESV Study Notes).

¹⁶ Two responses to the wicked: 1. Confronted by God. 2. God gives them their fill - "heaping on them the very things they love. They are men...of the world: give them their fill of it! To have everyone but God is judgment enough - a theme made explicit by the utter contrast of the final verse" (Kidner 106).

¹⁷ Portion - this world as portion - earthbound - is in contrast to Psalm 16: "You are my chosen portion and my cup, you hold my lot."

Yahweh. He literally meets Job in a two-way dialogue as a friend. And Job meets with God and is NOT consumed.

In Job 40:8, God says to Job, “Must I be condemned that you should be justified?” In other words, “Job, just because you don’t know why suffering happens does that mean that I am guilty? In this passage in the “micro sense” the answer is “no”, God is not condemned. But in the “macro sense” in the narrative of Scripture pointing to Christ, the answer is “yes”: God must be condemned in order for me to be justified. This is what happens in Christ. He is condemned that we may have fellowship with God. May this melt our hearts.

Conclusion of Job: Job does not get both things he asks for in the beginning. Instead he says, “I repent”, Job 42:6, meaning literally I take it all back. He does not get answers why he suffered: he gets the transcendent God in fellowship. That is also better than full, immediate and complete vindication too. In addition, he forgives his friends, and offers sacrifices for them for their wrong doing to him.

We are tempted to say, “I am suffering, and I don’t deserve it: give me explanation and vindication.” Turn that around and say, “I am saved by a man who suffered and literally did NOT deserve it. If he did that for me, I can trust him that he is more than enough to satisfy me, and vengeance is his alone not mine.

V. The rewards of love: David rejoices that he has MORE than enough.

15 As for me, I shall behold¹⁸ your face in righteousness; when I awake¹⁹, I shall be satisfied²⁰ with your likeness²¹.



¹⁸ In contrast to verse 13 where the wicked face God in judgment, this is the righteous facing God like Moses, as friend (Deuteronomy 34:10). David knows God. We know God too through ultimate Moses Jesus Christ this side of the cross. And we feel this and do this by his indwelling Spirit.

¹⁹ This is knowing God both now and in the future: the resurrection is certainly in mind but it is also knowing God now. “To know God face to face and see his form was the supreme privilege of Moses (Numbers 12:8), and since he saw him not in dreams but waking (Numbers 12:6) some expository suggest that the words when I awake meant to the psalmist no more than this” (Kidner 107).

²⁰ This literally is translated “more than enough.”

²¹ David leaves us at the climax, a final note of hope of satisfaction in the God for whom he is made: “The final verse leaves these earthly preoccupations behind. Night will give way to a cloudless morning” (Kidner p104).