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Psalm 52

Why Do You Boast, O Evildoer?

Over the past couple of weeks, we preached through the book of Esther, and we saw a picture of trusting in God and walking in faithful obedience even when you are unjustly hated, persecuted, and threatened by the wicked. We saw how God is sovereign, even over such situations that seem bleak and hopeless from our point of view, and that we must trust the Lord and obey, even when it looks like we're doomed, because He is good and faithful. It's one thing to see this situation played out in someone else's life - like reading about it in the book of Esther, seeing it happen to other people, and then getting to see the happy conclusion and clearly see the big picture of what God was doing. But it's another thing altogether to have to actually live in that kind of situation, without knowing what will happen or what God is doing. We know and believe that He is sovereign and faithful, even when the wicked oppress and threaten us unjustly, but how do we deal with those doubts and fears that linger in our hearts in such moments? We know we must walk faithfully, even when it's costly, scary, and difficult, but how do we find the courage, strength, and ability to actually do so? How do we deal with the storm of emotions that rages in our hearts? What do we do with our fear, doubt, insecurity, frustration, and outright anger at the wicked? We must bridge our theology and practice by prayers of faith. And that's exactly what Psalm 52 shows us how to do. Here we see an example of how to respond faithfully when we are being threatened and mistreated by the wicked and suffering unjustly.

Psalm 52 is a psalm of David, and we're even told the context in which he wrote this psalm: "when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, 'David has come to the house of Ahimelech.'" This is in the superscript of the psalm: that's the fancy word we use for the subheading you see above most psalms. The top headings in bold above it aren't actually part of scripture; those are put there by the modern editors, and that's why they're different between different translations. But the *superscript* beneath the heading of each psalm *is* part of scripture, written by the original authors, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And this one tells us that David wrote this psalm at a particular moment in his life: during the episode dealing with Doeg the Edomite.

We're told about this story of David's life in 1 Samuel, chapters 21 and 22. At this point in David's life, he has been anointed by Samuel as God's chosen King for Israel, has killed

Goliath the giant, has married a princess, and has become a legendary war hero among God's people - and yet, he still isn't king. In fact, he's on the run, because King Saul wants to kill him. We talked about King Saul over the last couple of weeks when going through Esther, but let me give a quick refresher: Saul was the first king of Israel, and he ended up being a very *bad* king. He made an unlawful sacrifice, and made a rash vow, but the decisive moment was when he defeated the Amalekites, and God told him to utterly destroy all of the Amalekites and their possessions - but instead, Saul spared Agag the king and kept the best of his plunder. So God rejected him as king and chose David instead. But Saul didn't like that. So he wanted to kill David instead. Saul's son, Jonathan, loved David as a best friend, and he warned David that the king was going to try and kill him again, so David ran away from town and headed for the hills. He ran to Nob, a town where all the priests and the tabernacle was (remember, this was before there was a temple, the tabernacle was a mobile tent temple). David didn't have any provisions, so Ahimelech the priest helps him out, giving him bread to eat and Goliath's sword since he didn't have a weapon. But there's a problem: Doeg the Edomite was there. Edomites were the descendants of Esau, not part of Israel, not part of the covenant people of God, and were pagans. Yet we're told he was one of Saul's best herdsmen, and he was detained there before the Lord, presumably following the ceremonial laws. But then we learn that Doeg is not the worshipper of God that he claims to be.

In 1 Sam. 21, as King Saul is brooding darkly and grumbling loudly about how none of his servants will tell him where David is, and that even his own son chose to help David instead of him, then all of the sudden we see Doeg pop up. He's the very epitome of a greedy, slimy opportunist, looking to worm his way into the king's good favor, without the slightest concern about other people. He tells King Saul all about how he saw David in Nob and how the priests helped him. So Saul has the priests brought before him, and when they tell him what happened, he's furious and orders his guards to strike them down - but the guards, who have a moral conscience, refuse. But then Saul orders Doeg to strike them down, and he doesn't hesitate. He kills the innocent priests of God, then goes and massacres everyone else in the town of Nob. Doeg is a wicked, evil man, and so is Saul who sent him. Saul wanted to spare the wicked, pagan king Agag whom God ordered him to execute, yet Saul has no qualms at all about killing God's holy priests and the innocent townsfolk of Nob. It's a picture of rank wickedness and injustice.

It's in this context that David writes this psalm. It's a prayer to God, pouring out the anguish of his heart to the Lord; but it's also directed directly *to Doeg*, speaking in the second person against Doeg the evildoer; and, thirdly, it's also a psalm, a song meant for the people of God to sing in worship. So it's not just telling us about David's life or emotions; it's written to us, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the Word of God, showing us how we are to respond to such situations in our own lives, when we hear of the kind of heartbreaking news that David did. Instead of naming Doeg in the psalm itself, it's left open, so that we can apply it to our own situations; Doeg serves as a stand-in for the boastful, high-hand evildoers of every age. And this psalm teaches us that it is appropriate to call out their sin for what it is, and even to rebuke them openly and publicly at times. This is an "imprecatory" psalm, a psalm calling for God's judgment against real enemies. Now, I want to qualify that and make sure no one misunderstands me: this isn't saying this is how we ought to talk to *everyone* who sins against us, nor even most of the time. Psalm 51, right before this one, shows David as acknowledging and repenting from his sins. David, like all of us, was a sinner, too. He knew it, confessed it, and repented. By contrast, Psalm 52:1 shows us that the kind of person David is talking about here (such as Doeg) is not repentant for his sins at all: he is "boasting" about his wickedness; he *loves* evil more than good, he lives in evil and chases after ways to deceive and destroy people.

This helpfully sets the stage for us to rightly understand and apply this psalm: this is not a harsh stick to beat people over the head with anytime they sin or slight us or do something we don't like. We can't start praying imprecatory prayers of judgment and calling down the curses of God just because someone gave us a nasty look or made an unkind comment or got angry with us. We *especially* can't apply this towards those who are repentant and sincerely apologetic for their sins, such as our fellow Christians. This is reserved for *boastful* evildoers, those who are openly sinning and proud of it; who justify their sin and evil, who delight in oppressing others, speaking lies, and destroying other people. This is teaching us how to deal with, pray about, and speak against the hardened, boastful, presumptuously proud, high-handed evil-doers and wicked who are deceiving and destroying people with either words and deeds. When we are confronted by boastful evildoers, we must call out the foolishness and futility of their sin, rebuke them, remember that God's coming judgment and salvation is certain, and rejoice in gratitude by trusting in the sure hope we have in Christ.

I. Recounting the foolish sins of the boastful evildoer (vv.1-4)

The psalm begins, in vv.1-4, by recounting the activities of the evil-doer in question and declare them to be futile and foolish. It begins with v.1: “Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all day.” We’re immediately introduced to this evil man who’s unrepentant, sinning deliberately and proudly, even boasting of his evil ways. He has a hard heart; he’s committing high-handed sins. He’s called a “mighty man,” but David very well might be using sarcasm here; Doeg was a herdsman, not a mighty warrior; he struck down innocent, bound priests, and a town full of innocent women, children, and elderly, not warriors. David is mocking him, like someone saying, “What are you so smug about, tough guy?” David begins with a question, “Why do you boast of evil?” He’s questioning the sense of why the evildoer boasts, implying the futility of his boasting and false security, since God’s steadfast love endures - and therefore, will surely protect His people in the end and shall surely destroy the wicked. This is an open rebuke against the boasting wicked, the gloating evildoer, declaring the futility, folly, and finitude of his ways. It is foolish to boast of evil, to shake your fist against God and oppress His people, because God’s steadfast love endures forever; He isn’t going to let the evildoer get away with it.

In verses 2-4, David recounts what this boastful evildoer is doing, calling out his foolish sin: The wicked evildoer boasts, lies, and plots the destruction of the righteous. He is boastful and presumptuously confident in evil ways, as we see in v.1. In v.3, he “Loves evil more than good”(v.3). He has a lying and deceitful tongue. He is a “Worker of deceit” (v.2). He “Love[s] lying more than speaking what is right” (v.3). He has a “deceitful tongue” (v.4). He is an enemy of the truth, even as he asserts himself as the only who proclaims truth. He ends up twisting the truth and turning it into a razor blade to cut people down with, deceiving and betraying, sowing seeds of deception that give birth to destruction. He doesn’t just speak lying and deceitful words, but seeks to do real damage and harm, with both his words and his deeds, because he plots and desires destruction and evil. He “Plots destruction” (v.2) He loves “all words that devour” (v.4) - words that cause real harm and damage and destruction.

David is recounting is acknowledging the sinful deeds, words, and plots of the wicked. He’s doing it in three ways here: first, in prayer to the Lord; secondly, to the congregation of the righteous people of God; and third, directly to the evildoer himself. And we need to learn from each of these three ways that David is recounting the evil deeds of the boastful wicked, to learn from this example how *we* are to respond in similar situations.

First, we must recount the sins of the boastful wicked before the Lord in prayer. By the time we get to the end of the psalm, and see David talking directly to God, we see that's exactly what this is: a prayer. And this is what we need to do, too. When our hearts are broken and filled with grief, pain, sadness, anger, or confusion because of what wicked, evil people are doing, we need to respond, first and foremost, with prayer, bringing it to God. As we meditate and reflect and process our situations in prayer, we should recount before God all the things that we're upset about and grieved over. Instead of keeping the emotions bottled up inside, vent your anger and frustration before God in prayers of lament. As you do, and you're telling God why you're angry at someone you consider evil, ask God to examine your own hearts, to show us if we are misreading the situation at all, and to help us to respond in a godly way, to be angry and not sin (Eph. 4:26). Vent out your heart, list your grievances, and ask God for help in dealing with it.

Secondly, we see here that it is also appropriate at times to recount the sins of the wicked in the congregation of the godly. Tell it to other Christians, your fellow church members, in appropriate settings and ways. We need to be careful here, because want to avoid gossip. And we don't want to air others' dirty laundry. However, when we think we are being oppressed by the wickedness of others, and its eating us up inside, even after we've prayed about it, we should talk to another Christian about it, for solidarity, godly counsel, and more prayer. If you're unsure, it's a good idea to share with a trusted brother or sister, a more mature Christian in the faith discipling you, or one of your pastors. And when certain sins or acts of wicked oppression or injustice are being done more publicly, then it is appropriate to talk about it with your small group or at a church prayer meeting. If we all just keep silent about these things and don't talk about them, then we feel alone and isolated, like maybe it's just us and we're the crazy ones for being upset and bothered about it. This makes us weaker to the schemes of the Devil and weakens our faith. But when we talk about it with one another, and identify public sin for what it is or call out the public schemes and lies of evildoers who are loving evil and boasting in it, this does us good (so long as we do it in a Christlike way, driven by love and truth, not malice and bitterness).

This psalm is calling out, specifically, words that are deceitful and destructive. How many words are spoken by evildoers today that claim to be nice and true and reasonable, but are actually deceitful and destructive? If we stay silent about them, our brothers and sisters could very well be deceived or destroyed by them. And so we must call them out for what they are. We

have to call a spade a spade, and not dance around the issues or beat around the bush. And when we do so, this not only alerts us to the dangers of what's out there, but it validates and strengthens our faith, so that we say, "I knew there was something wrong with that; I'm glad to know I'm not the only one who's bothered by this." It strengthens us to take a stand.

So let's not beat around the bush this morning: examples of unrepentant wicked people, who boast of their evil and are proud of it, who love deceit and destruction, are all over the place, and we need to call them out, without being afraid of being considered controversial or making people upset. The biggest example of this is the abortion industry. We're told that it's reproductive healthcare or about women's rights, but that's a lie, deception seeking destruction; it's evil murder. In the holocaust, 6 million Jews were unjustly killed over the span of 5 years. In our country alone, between the years 1988 and 1993 - a similar 5 year period - at least 6,945,000 babies were aborted, just in America.¹ A higher death toll than the Holocaust. It's estimated that 50 to 85 million people were killed in WWII. It's estimated nearly 70 million babes were just in our country since Roe v. Wade. AND that's just in our country. We don't know how many millions have around the world. This is the greatest human tragedy of destruction in world history yet we're told constantly - by friends and family, by news reporters and politicians, even by some people pretending to be doctors and scientists - that this is a good thing, that it's good for women. They are constantly trying to deceive and gaslight us, but we know life is life and murder is murder, and we must call out deception and destruction and the love of evil when we see it.

And there are many other lies wreaking massive havoc and destruction all over the place in our day. The lie of transgenderism is ruining people's lives and doing irrevocable damage to boys and girls, men and women, even taking lives, to fill evil people's pocket books. We can't stay silent about that; that's an evil industry profiting off the misery of others through destruction and deception. Politicians are inciting violent riots in the streets, excusing attacks against law enforcement, and letting criminals walk free, for their own personal gain at the expense of the masses. People, around our country and even more around the world, are harassing Christians and disrupting church services, arresting and beating Christians, making it illegal to believe and speak biblical truth, destroying church buildings, and martyring our brothers and sisters for their

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https://www.statista.com/statistics/185274/number-of-legal-abortion-in-the-us-since-2000/?srsltid=AfmBOoqPastuNN5nifb2ZVVsg7_ufQW2XwB7x5OrhncxXZjy_R3a1e72

faith - like in Nigeria, the worst, but also China, Mexico, Russia, every single Muslim country, and more. We have to call these things out and name them for what they are: evil.

And there comes a point where we must call out the wicked and rebuke them, like David does here, which brings us to our second point...

II. Rebuking the wicked with warnings of coming judgment (v.5)

Verses 1-4 are in the second person, directed at the boastful evildoer (such as Doeg). Verse 5 ramps it up with a strong word of rebuke and stern warning: "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." These are very strong words of rebuke and warning: they say to the evildoer, you may boast confidently in your evil deeds, but God will *break you down* like a house destroyed by a wrecking ball; he will snatch you out of your tent, your home, and leave you homeless; he will uproot you like an uprooted tree and take you out of the land of the living." No mincing of words here. This is a stern rebuke and a warning that the judgment of God is coming and He will execute vengeance, justice, and holy wrath against the wicked. Some commentators think its best to translate these clauses as, "*May God break you down... May God snatch you... May God uproot you...*" Either way, the rebuke is clear.

There comes a time where we have to call out evildoers publicly, to recount their evil, wicked deeds to their face. We might recoil at this, and think that its harsh and not loving, but if we think that, then we find ourselves in an awkward position, because it would force us to have to say that psalms like Psalm 52 are harsh and unloving, or that Jesus Himself was harsh and unloving, since He called out people for their sin and injustice all the time. John the Baptist even got imprisoned and beheaded for it, and Jesus made clear that John the Baptist did the right thing. We have to learn that "being nice" is not always the same thing as being "loving." Yes, loving your wife means you should be nice and tender to her. But loving your enemies does *not* always mean you should be nice to them. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is to call out their sins so that they can be warned and, hopefully, repent from their evil ways and be saved in Christ. We must rebuke the boastful wicked and proclaim imprecatory warnings at times.

So may God utterly break and destroy the entire abortion industry. May God utterly destroy Planned Parenthood and break it down like a ruined house, until nothing is left. May God uproot the entire abortion industry like an uprooted tree, exposing its sin, evil, lies, and dirty rotten schemes for all to see. May God smite the conscience of every single abortion murderer

masquerading as a doctor and reveal them to be instruments of death and destruction; may God expose the lies of those who advocate for the abortion industry for the monstrous liars and deceivers that they are. May God uproot every single person who kills a child, be it theirs or someone else's, or convinces others to do so. May God remove the tent of every single person who profits off the abortion industry, making them penniless and homeless. Maybe God break each of their hearts, keep them from committing any more evil, and bring them to repentance of their evil ways, that they may turn in faith to Jesus Christ, seek and find forgiveness in His cleansing blood and grace, and warn others away from these evils. May God do these same to those who profit off of peddling the lies of transgenderism and butchering the youth of our country. May God destroy human trafficking, end the lies that allow it to occur, uproot traffickers and save and deliver the poor women and children so grievously oppressed by it, tear down the wicked and evil oppressing them, and make homeless and penniless everyone profiting off of the sorrow and suffering of the weak and vulnerable. May God uproot and destroy all who oppress, persecute, imprison, and kill His children, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And we know that, in His perfect timing, God will. Maybe in our lifetime, maybe not; maybe sooner, maybe later. But He *will* deliver perfect justice eventually, at the coming day of judgment, when all shall stand before His throne, bringing us to our third point...

III. Remembering that justice and the salvation of God's people is inevitable (vv.6-7)

In v.6, the psalm starts to take a more hopeful turn, declaring that because the judgment of God against the wicked is sure, so is the coming salvation of God's people. We see this in vv.6-7: "The righteous shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying, '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!'" The righteous are those who trust in the Lord; we are righteous by *faith*. None of us are righteous in ourselves; we are all sinners who deserve to be swept away in the wrath of God, along with all the wicked. When we see the judgment of the wicked, it should rightly strike the fear of the Lord in our hearts, remind us to daily repent and turn to Christ in faith. But as we look to Christ, and trust in what Jesus has done *for us*, we are declared righteous by grace through faith in Jesus, not our works, so that none may boast.

But those who *do* boast in their evil deeds and justify their sin and refuse to seek refuge in God or find forgiveness in Christ will face the inevitable wrath of God. We must never forget that this day is coming, a day of judgment against God's enemies - against our enemies - and a

day of salvation for us as the people of God, if our faith is in Christ Jesus. Today, the wicked laugh and profit off of the deception and destruction of others, even God's people; but on that coming day, the righteous shall have the last laugh - not malicious laughter, not delighting in their destruction, but the laughter of relief and joy that the dark times are over. God will vindicate us and prove that we are on the right side of history, because we are on God's side. The wicked will not get away with their evil and their boasting will be shown foolish and futile once and for all.

So we must remember this, and proclaim it to the world, rebuking the wicked and warning them of the coming day of judgment. And as we do so, we must do so with truth and hearts full of love. We don't sugar coat our language. But we also must not speak out of hatred, bitterness, or malice. No, we speak out of love, both for those who are being oppressed and persecuted and destroyed, *and* for the evildoers. We warn them of the coming day of wrath against their wickedness, and implore them to *repent* - to confess their sins, turn away from these evils, and turn to Christ in faith, asking God to have mercy and forgive them, to spare them from the judgment they deserve and give them new hearts, and believing that Jesus Christ came for this very purpose: to live a perfect life, die on the cross for our sins, and rise again so that whoever repents and believes in Him shall be saved! This is our hope, the hope of the gospel; this is why we can have assurance that on the day of Judgment we will be saved and not destroyed; not because we are sinless, but because we are trusting in our sinless savior who laid down His life as a substitutionary sacrifice in our place. And if God's grace is big enough for us, it's big enough for anybody - even the worst evildoer in the world. But this grace requires *repentance*. It's not a free pass to sin. It's a call to repent and truly believe, to follow Jesus. And so we rebuke and warn the wicked and invite the whole world to repent and follow Christ in faith, even as we make this our aim every day of our lives. And when we do, it brings us joy...

IV. Rejoicing and trusting in God's steadfast love for us that endures forever, even amidst unjust suffering (vv.8-9)

The psalm concludes by contrasting the ultimate fate of the wicked vs the righteous, reminding us that we have every reason to rejoice and trust in God, and even give Him thanks, no matter what the wicked evildoers say and do. V.8 tell us of the fate of those who trust in God: "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 paints a vivid contrast: the wicked will be like a broken down house, tentless and

homeless, and an uprooted tree (v.5) but the godly will be like a ripe olive tree (a very long living tree) that thrives in the permanent house of God forever! Doeg killed the priests in the tabernacle, but they who trust in the Lord are raised up to live in the house of God, the true dwelling place of God in Heaven, to have endless life, joy, and peace, free from the horrors and sorrows of evil forever! This contrast echoes Psalm 1: the wicked are swept away, but the one who trusts in God is blessed, like a tree planted by a stream and is ever fruitful, never withering. So it shall be for us if we trust in the Lord.

And this isn't just pointing us to a future hope: it's telling us that our future hope in the promise of gospel is so sure and certain that it gives us *present joy and gratitude*, no matter what else is going on. That's what we see in v.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." David's situation didn't change; yet he thanks God because He trusts in the Lord and knows His future is secure. He pours out his heart to the Lord, has spoken truth to himself, to the righteous, and the wicked - and now he tells his heart to get in line and trust in this truth he's just proclaimed, to rest in it. And we must tell our hearts to do the same. The wicked shall not win; we will be vindicated by God and raised up to everlasting life! We know how the story ends, because Christ has already defeated the grave and declares us more than conquerors if we trust in Him! So when you're feeling overwhelmed and all of the sad, angry, or confused emotions are swelling up inside you and it feels like you're going to burst, take it to God - pour your heart out to the Lord in prayer, remind yourself the facts of the gospel, and then trust the Lord; trust that His Word is true; trust that He has already promised you how the story will end; trust that Christ has already secured your victory and future salvation. Trust that this is true no matter what your adversaries say, think, or do. It doesn't matter what they say; it only matters what God says. It doesn't matter what they do; it only matters what God does.

Let's rejoice and thank God as an act of faith. Be confident, not in yourself, but in the sure promises of God, and you shall never be shaken. And that's exactly what we proclaim in the Lord's Supper. If you're a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel believing church, we invite you to come to the Table and rejoice in the hope of the gospel with us in just a moment. But if that doesn't describe you, then there's a different way for you to respond: first, repent of your sins and trust that Jesus Christ died to save you from the wrath you deserve. Then, proclaim your faith in baptism and join his church, waiting upon the lord in the presence of Godly, just

like v.9 says. If you have any questions about that, we would love to speak with you after the service. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.