

A Psalm of Confident Faith

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[0 : 00] We are in the middle of a little series on a bunch of Psalms, so if you would turn with me to Psalm 26. That's our Psalm for this lunchtime. Psalm 26, which you can find on page 459 in the Church Bibles.

And let's read this together now. Psalm 26. It's a Psalm of David. Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.

Prove me, O Lord, and try me. Test my mind and my heart, for your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness.

I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.

I wash my hands in innocence and go round your altar, O Lord, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud and telling all your wondrous deeds. O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.

[1 : 13] Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands are evil devices and whose right hands are all full of bribes.

But, as for me, I shall walk in my integrity. Redeem me and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground.

In the great assembly, I will bless the Lord. Well, in a moment, we'll spend a few minutes thinking about this psalm.

But before we do that, let's pray together as we come to the Lord. Our Heavenly Father, the Sovereign Lord over all creation, the Creator of all the universe, you who brought everything into being with a word, blessed and hallowed be your name.

May your name be praised and honoured in all the earth. And as we gather together this lunchtime, no doubt with many issues and difficulties and pressures weighing in upon us, might you refresh us and cause us to look up from the temporary, momentary issues that trouble us and gaze upon your unchanging, everlasting name, you who are the same yesterday, today and forever, full of mercy and abounding in steadfast love.

[2 : 43] Remind us afresh that you delight in those who turn to you in repentance and faith. You delight in your children, not through any merit of our own, but because of Christ's perfect life, his perfect obedience counted to us because our sin and shame and punishment was counted to him.

Thank you that we can gather together this lunchtime and read from your precious word, your true word. And might you feed us that we might become better servants, worshippers of you in response to your wonderful grace, poured out on unworthy sinners like us.

So we thank you for this great privilege and help us now. We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, I'm sure that many people in this room have been accused of doing something they just haven't done at some stage in their lives.

Maybe that's you. Perhaps that's never happened to you, but it's bound to at some point.

Somebody will make an accusation that is just not true.

Let me give you an example. I'm sure many of you have seen the film *The Fugitive*. It was out about 20 years ago. I was speaking to a friend of mine who's a lawyer, and I was asking her to give me some examples of people, perhaps in legal cases, where someone has been accused of something they just haven't done.

[4 : 26] My friend scratched her head and said, have you seen *The Fugitive*? Now, I was a bit disappointed, because I was hoping for some nice little personal anecdote that I could share, but a Hollywood blockbuster will have to do.

And it's the story of a doctor falsely accused of murdering his own wife. And it's based on a true story, I understand. And he's sent off to prison.

But on the way, the bus that is taking them to prison crashes. And he's able to escape. And in the end, he is somehow able to clear his name, to be vindicated, to have his name cleared once again. And when false accusations come, all you want to do is have your name cleared, isn't it? That's what vindication is, having your name cleared.

And that is what our psalm is about this lunchtime. Look at the very first words, the opening words of this psalm. Vindicate me, O Lord, vindicate me.

[5 : 33] Now, to be accused of doing something wrongful is very painful. Even if the one accusing you is absolutely right. It's painful because you've been found out.

You haven't got away with it. It's been discovered that you actually took that last bit of chocolate cake, or whatever it is, something more serious usually. But to be accused of doing something you just haven't done, to have your name dragged through the mud, even though you've done nothing to deserve it, that is a whole different level of pain and difficulty.

Think, perhaps, of the Christian leader, maligned by people within and outside the church when he's done nothing wrong. His name dragged through the press, subject to scorn, false accusations. So very painful. Think, perhaps, of the Christian in the workplace, accused of doing something wrong when there was little evidence linking the misdeed to her, and it's just not the sort of thing she would ever do.

So very painful. What to do in those situations? Well, it's exactly that situation that we have in our psalm this lunchtime.

[6 : 50] We see here that David calls to God for his vindication. And as we'll see in a moment, David is confident of the outcome. He is confident for two reasons.

First, because he walks with the Lord in obedience. And second, because he is careful of the company that he keeps. Those two reasons mean that David is confident that he's going to be found in the clear, confident that he'll be vindicated.

And I hope that you and I will find these to be grounds for confidence too, as perhaps we will at some point face a similar situation.

So firstly, we notice that David calls to God for vindication. David calls to God for vindication. He makes very clear, doesn't he, his reason for writing.

He is appealing to the Lord. He is crying out to him, verse 1, for vindication. He wants to be cleared of blame or suspicion. He wants his name to be put in the right.

[7 : 54] And verse 2, he asks the Lord to prove him, to test him, to try him, his whole being, heart and mind. Now, here's a question that leaps out at us.

Isn't David being perhaps just a little arrogant here? His plea for vindication there at the first half of verse 1 is followed immediately by a reason as to why it should be granted.

Just look down there. For I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Now, surely, David's being just a bit presumptuous here, isn't he?

Isn't this expressing, as one writer put it, a spirit of self-righteousness bordering on the Pharisaic? I've done nothing wrong. Well, on the first read, you might come to that conclusion.

But a closer reading, looking at what David is saying, reveals that he is not being arrogant or presumptuous at all. Rather, David is expressing confident faith, confident that he'll be vindicated because he is in the right.

[8 : 59] He knows he's innocent of the charges being leveled against him, and his plea to God is that he'll be publicly found to be in the clear. Now, we don't know exactly what's happened for David to seek vindication.

We know nothing about the situation that led him to write this psalm other than what's in the psalm itself. Perhaps his character's been tarred, or his actions put under the microscope in an unpleasant way.

Accusations from outside are coming at him hard and fast. But he turns to the Lord for vindication. He turns to the one that can only truly vindicate him.

And whatever the accusations are, whatever the source of the accusations, he rightly turns to the Lord, asking him that he would publicly be found to be in the clear.

Now, notice that David doesn't appeal to man for vindication. Isn't this usually the first place that you and I turn to? I know it's certainly true for me. I long for another human being to vindicate me, to

validate my actions.

[10:07] When criticism comes, I want someone to come alongside and say, you're doing a good job. Don't you long for the approval of man? But don't go there. There is, in the end, only one opinion, one judgment that really matters, and it's the Lord's.

And we'll often go anywhere else first, won't we? So when your character is dragged into the mud, painful as that is, when your integrity is called into question, we see here who we must turn to, the only one that is able to truly vindicate us.

But we need to realize that this is not the psalm to echo in your prayers. If the accusations being leveled against you are actually true, perhaps the accusation that you've been faced with, perhaps from a work colleague or a family member, is actually right on the money.

They're right. It may just be the case that you've not been totally truthful with the accounts at work. You've inflated the figures to make yourself look better than you actually are. It might just be that you've made up the marks for your class's coursework to save your own skin.

The accusations against you might actually be right. And what you need to do is not turn to the Lord seeking vindication, but rather turn to him in repentance, confessing your wrongdoing.

[11:34] And that's what we considered last week in Psalm 32, the necessity of confession and repentance. So there's our first point. The Christian turns to the Lord for vindication.

And as we've already mentioned, David is confident in the outcome. His plea is confident because he knows he will be vindicated. And there are two reasons. The first one is that he is confident because he walks in obedience.

David is confident of vindication because he walks in obedience. The general direction of David's life is right in the sight of the Lord.

Not sinless perfection, but a general orientation in life that is set on serving the Lord. He is claiming innocence in relation to the particular charges that have been brought against him because he walks rightly with the Lord.

In other words, his ground for his confidence is that he knows he walks with the Lord. I wonder if you noticed the walking verbs in the Psalm.

[12:42] Look down with me. Verse 1, he says, For I have walked in my integrity. Verse 3, I walk in your faithfulness or truth. And then flick over to verse 11, But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity.

I have walked. I walk. I shall walk. David shows his desire to persist on this path of living with integrity, living rightly before the Lord.

Now, this isn't faultlessness or sinless perfection, but rather wholeheartedness and sincerity in the Christian life. David seeks to obey the Lord with wholehearted commitment.

And the grounds for his living, the reason that he lives like this, is God's steadfast covenant love. Verse 3, For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness.

God promised David his steadfast love. And David, in response, trusts in God's promises, taking the Lord at his word and striving to live in obedience to his law.

[13:54] The reason David lives as he does, seeking to walk with integrity, to walk in truth, is because of God's promise of steadfast love.

And that's the same for Christians living today. True faith is always accompanied by obedience. Not perfect obedience, but obedience nonetheless. Now, such obedience doesn't guarantee salvation, but it is a sign that salvation has been received.

So to live rightly before the Lord in response to his steadfast love is something all Christians should strive for. To walk in integrity, to walk in obedience, is to be prized, not despised.

Willie Phillips' father, commenting on this, says the following, David is asserting here that the general direction of his life is right in the sight of God, a life right in its basic essentials in relation to God and his sovereign purposes.

So let's not be ashamed to live lives that are walked confidently, obediently, submitting to his will. The Christian life is more than what we believe and think.

[15:07] It's about what we do and say. It's how we walk. So is the general direction of your life a grounds for confidence or a grounds for shame?

Will how you walk be a source of confidence of vindication when accusations come? David draws confidence from his life, a life lived in response to God's steadfast love.

David lives a faithful life because God is faithful. Now is that true of you this lunchtime? Are you walking in obedience? Is that a grounds for confidence?

So that's David's first reason for his confidence that God will vindicate him. So let's look now to the second reason. That's his first. His second reason is this.

He is confident because he is careful about the company he keeps. David is confident of vindication because he's careful about the company he keeps. Look with me again at the central section of the psalm for a moment.

[16:13] Let me read again verses 4 to 8. I do not sit with men of falsehood nor do I consult with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers and I will not sit with the wicked.

I wash my hands in innocence and go round your altar, O Lord, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud and telling all your wondrous deeds. O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.

David is clear, isn't he, about who he spends his time with. He has made his choice. He does not associate with men of falsehood, the hypocrites, the evildoers, the wicked.

Notice that he says, I do not sit, verse 4, and I will not sit, verse 5. He has been determined and is determined for the future to remain separate from the company of fools.

And in contrast to that, he loves to be in the temple, the place where the Lord's glory dwells. David practices a right separation from the world.

[17:23] And this is wise living. This is Psalm 1 living. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. This is a right separation from the world.

It's not withdrawing into a comfortable Christian ghetto. If we did that, we'd be rendering Christ's great commission redundant. Nor is it complicity with the world.

That's the other extreme. To become so wrapped up in the world and its values that the Christian becomes utterly indistinguishable from all around it. We're to avoid those two extremes.

Rather, what's going on here is association with the world that is marked by a certain discomfort. Christ has sent us out into the world to be his ambassadors, to be fishers of men, to be salt and light.

But as we go out, we will feel ill at ease. We will rub shoulders of people who do not share our deepest convictions, our deepest emotions.

[18:29] And David is surely right, isn't he, to practice a right separation from men of falsehoods, from hypocrites, from evildoers, from the wicked. A separation from them and adjoining to the place where God's glory dwells, his temple.

There is a choice about whose company you seek and whose company you spend time in. You must make a choice about who you spend time with. It can be quite easy just to drift into patterns of life, patterns of spending time with particular people doing certain things.

And before you know it, you've ended up somewhere you never planned to be with people you never wanted to be with. Maybe you need to re-evaluate where you spend your time, who you spend it with.

David is quite clear, isn't he, about the choice he has made. And you and I need to be as clear about the company that we keep. So don't misunderstand me.

I'm not saying abandon anyone who doesn't share your faith in the Lord. Absolutely not. I'm not saying retreat into a holy huddle. I am saying be wise with who you spend your time with.

[19:44] It is a choice. Who are you spiritually aligned with? David is clear. And for David, it is a ground of confidence when misrepresentations, when lies, when false accusations come.

He keeps wise company. He knows those accusations won't stick. Are you as clear about the company you keep? So here we have a psalm of confident faith in the face of false accusations. David had accusations thrown at him, but he sought public vindication from the Lord, confident he'd be found in the clear because he knew he was in the clear. His walk in life wasn't perfect, but it was a walk in obedience.

He chose his company well, preferring the temple over fools. So as false accusations perhaps head in your direction, and they will come at some point, you too can have confidence as you strive to live in obedience.

Don't be tempted to be ashamed of being known as a man or woman of God who seeks to live in obedience. You can have confidence as you make wise choices about who you choose to spend time with.

[21 : 05] Perhaps it might be another church that you partner with, another leader that you know about who comes under fire. Take those accusations with a pinch of salt.

Seek that the Lord would vindicate them if they are actually in the clear. Ask yourself, before you believe everything you hear, does that man walk in obedience? Does he keep wise company? If the answer is yes to both of those questions, then be very careful before you believe the accusations that have been leveled against them. So whether it's yourself or someone else that you know, prepare now for those false accusations that will inevitably come at some point in life. Be known as a man or woman who walks in confidence, who walks in obedience, and who keeps wise company. Trust and obey, for there is no other way.

we are kept when shadows arise as we trust and obey. Do this so that you can seek vindication from the Lord when enemies circle and stand, as David does in verse 12, with conscience clear in the great assembly, praising our Lord.

[22 : 28] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for this psalm, which speaks quite specifically about seeking vindication when our name is dragged through the mud, when false accusations are leveled, and we want nothing else but to be cleared, to be found to be innocent.

Help us to take on board what we've learnt, to seek, to walk in obedience, to keep wise company, so that we can stand confidently as David does, seeking vindication from yourself.

We ask this in your name. Amen.