

A True View of History

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[0 : 00] Well, good afternoon, friends, and a very warm welcome to our Bible talk this Wednesday here at the Tron Church. We are delighted to see you all.

Well, let's bow our heads together for some moments of prayer. As the hymn writer has put it, cast care aside, lean on your guide, his boundless mercy will provide, trust, and your trusting soul shall prove Christ is its life and Christ its love.

We do thank you, dear Heavenly Father, for these encouragements, injunctions drawn from the scriptures to cast care aside and to put our trust in you and in our Lord Jesus, whom you have sent to be our Savior.

And thank you so much, dear Heavenly Father, that as we put our trust in you and in the Lord Jesus, our trusting soul shall prove that the Lord Christ indeed is our life and our everything, our love.

We thank you for the experience that you've given to so many of us over the years of leaning the weight of our confidence upon our Savior and finding that even in life's most difficult episodes and times, he is a wonderful support, the only true support, the only lasting one.

[1 : 35] And we thank you so much also, dear Father, that the goal, the final destiny and end of the Christian life is your own company in heaven where we shall see you face to face.

And we shall, along with so many others who are redeemed, we shall rejoice and be filled with thankfulness that we belong to you forever and that this life, this life on earth, has been only the preliminary for the great joy of eternal life to be lived with you.

So, dear Father, today, as we're still in our pilgrimage on this earth, we pray that you will encourage us and teach us from your word.

May it be food and drink to us, meat to us, nourishment to our souls, to help us to love you, to serve you, and to persevere. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, our Bible passage for today, as you'll see from the paper, is Psalm 11, Psalm number 11. And if you've got one of our big church Bibles, you'll find this on page 452, page 452.

[2 : 51] And we're looking during this month of May at a number of the shorter Psalms of David, Songs of David. So here we have Psalm number 11. In the Lord I take refuge.

How can you say to my soul, flee like a bird to your mountain? For behold, the wicked bend the bow. They have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart.

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven.

His eyes see. His eyelids test the children of man. The Lord tests the righteous. But his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.

Let him rain coals on the wicked. Fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the Lord is righteous. He loves righteous deeds.

[3 : 57] The upright shall behold his face. When I said last week as we were looking at Psalm number 8, that these Psalms of David are not written simply for David's personal pleasure or amusement.

He's not like the kind of modern singer-songwriter who writes some kind of soulful song so as to gaze at his own navel and then feel better. I don't mean that all modern songs are like that, but some of them certainly are.

But David is not like that. He writes these songs so as to educate and encourage his people. He is, after all, the monarch of Israel. And he's very conscious of his responsibility to promote good morale in the nation and, in particular, to deepen the nation's understanding of what it means to know the Lord, to trust him, and to obey him.

In a way, it's a little bit like what our queen does every Christmas day as she addresses the nation. What she tries to do in her little speech is to boost morale, to promote unity.

And, of course, she gently commends the Lord Jesus as the one to trust and follow as well. Now, David's teaching is much broader and bigger and more detailed than that. But to boost morale and to help to hold the nation together is one of his purposes.

[5 : 18] Now, in this short psalm, number 11, David is teaching his people a true view of history, a right way of viewing how things are unfolding.

It was a true view back then, and it's still just as true today. And remember that David writes as a prophet. That's the way he's described by the apostle Peter in Acts chapter 2.

So, as a prophet, he's speaking to every generation, as much to us in the 21st century as to his own people back in the 10th century BC. And in this psalm, he's contrasting a false way of looking at history and current affairs with a true way, a true way which trustingly acknowledges that God is fully in control of everything that happens.

Now, look with me at the beginning, verse 1. As the psalm begins, it begins, as it were, partway through a conversation. David appears to be having a discussion with somebody.

It may be a friend. It may be a group of political advisors. But the psalm begins abruptly with David rounding on his advisors and contradicting them. I take refuge in the Lord, he says.

[6 : 32] How can you say to me, run away and hide? Flee like a bird to your mountain and get your head down in case somebody takes a pot shot at you. No, I don't need to do that. I trust the Lord.

He is the one that is my refuge. So, this is no song of personal navel gazing. This is a song born in the midst of some kind of political crisis.

David is under severe attack. Now, whether the weapons in verse 2 are actual bows and arrows or the weapons of words and smear campaigns, we're not clear about that.

But the king of Israel is certainly hard-pressed by his political enemies. Any modern head of state would immediately identify with this kind of pressure. The senior leader of any country is constantly being attacked and opposed by political adversaries.

And presidents, senior people do, as we know, sometimes get assassinated. I think four American presidents have been shot dead in the last couple of hundred years. And one British prime minister, did you know about that?

[7 : 39] Spencer Percival was his name. And he was shot in the lobby of the House of Commons in 1812 after being PM for three years. So, the picture we have here in verse 2 is all too realistic of an assassin waiting quietly at some street corner in Jerusalem or maybe hiding in a dark doorway until King David comes out for his evening stroll when an arrow is silently fitted into the bowstring and then speeds through the darkness to find its mark.

So, what are these advisors saying in verses 1, 2, and 3? No doubt, with the kind motive of preserving the life of their head of state. They are saying to David, get away from Jerusalem.

Find a quiet and safe spot where nobody can hurt you. And look at their reasoning there in verse 3. They say to him, if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

In other words, if the foundations of society are falling to pieces, we're lost. Anarchy is taking over. The fabric of our life is being destroyed. And there's nothing we can do to stop it.

There's a note of despair here in what these people are saying to King David. Do you ever imagine a similar scenario in modern Britain where things seem to be falling to pieces?

[9 : 02] Do you ever say to yourself, this is a very good country to live in. We have stable government, relatively speaking. We have well-run, fair elections. Power changes hand without bloodshed.

How glad I am not to be living in a place like Syria or the Yemen. But we might say to ourselves, what if it were all to change? What if Britain were to become involved in some great global convulsion involving the Americans and the Russians and the Chinese?

Would we survive? Might it be, in the words of verse 3, that the foundations of British society could be destroyed? Might it be sensible to flee to the mountains?

Maybe to go and live in a cottage up in the northwest of Sutherland and grow potatoes in the back garden so as to survive? Do you ever kind of think of that sort of thing? Well, that's the kind of advice that David's friends are giving to David.

But he answers them boldly in verse 1. In the Lord I take refuge. How can you say to me, run away and preserve your life and hide? Isn't that a great response?

[10:11] He's saying to his friends, have you forgotten the Lord? Have you forgotten who is really in charge of the world? And then in verses 4 to 7, David teaches his short-sighted friends, his fearful friends, to look up to the throne room of heaven.

And in those verses, he boldly teaches his friends, and us as well, what the Lord is really like and why, therefore, he can be fully trusted. So, what does David tell us about the Lord in this psalm? Let's notice three things. First, the Lord rules securely. Look at verse 4. The Lord is in his holy temple.

The Lord's throne is in heaven. Now, when David says the Lord is in his holy temple, David is not talking about the temple in Jerusalem. Because, of course, that was not yet built.

It was going to be built a generation later by his son Solomon. What David means is the Lord is in his dwelling place in heaven. He's not absent.

[11:17] He is there. And he is king. His throne is in heaven, says David. And that fact of God's kingly and secure rule, that is the response, the response to the anxious advice of verses 1, 2, and 3.

And it is the response, friends, to all the anxious imaginations of our hearts. The truth is that God rules the history of the world. And he rules the circumstances of every individual person.

When we listen to the news on the radio or the television, we never get any sense from the news media that the Lord might be somehow in control of events.

In the way that the news is presented, it all seems to be down to the politicians, doesn't it? What is President Trump going to do about this situation? What will President Putin say about that development?

How will Mrs. May or Mrs. Sturgeon respond to this particular problem? News reporting, as we listen to it, it always works on the assumption that everything is down to the political leaders to sort out the world's problems.

[12:28] Now, the political leaders, of course, have to step up and take responsibility. The Bible expects King David to lead his people wisely. The Bible praises good leadership and condemns bad leadership.

It treats kings and presidents as thoroughly responsible. But behind and above all the thrashing about of the political leaders, the Bible repeatedly tells us that the throne room of heaven is occupied.

God is in charge. God is in charge. And that's a great comfort to us on the political level. But it's also a great comfort on the personal level. I think of a Christian friend of mine who died some five or six years ago at the age of, I think, 61.

He became unwell, so he went to hospital and he had all sorts of tests for this and that. And finally, the consultant sat him down in his room and told him that he had between 12 and 18 months to live. My friend replied, well, that is a sentence of life. The consultant didn't know what to make of this Christian man. But my friend knew who was in charge.

[13:40] In David's words, he knew that the Lord's throne is in heaven. And he knew that for the Christian, death is the gateway to eternal life. The Lord rules securely.

Let's never doubt that. Secondly, David tells us that the Lord sees clearly. We're still in verse four. His eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.

Now, David's point here is not so much that the Lord has 20-20 vision, but rather that the Lord sees fully into the depths of every human heart. And because he sees perfectly, the Lord accurately assesses every human heart.

He knows us, every one of us. There is nowhere where we can hide from him. There is nothing we can conceal from him. Now, we're pretty skillful at concealing things from each other, aren't we? For example, if I have made a fraudulent tax return to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, I know about it, but you don't. Or, if you happen to say angry words to your nearest and dearest this morning before coming to church, you know about that, but I know nothing about it.

[14:56] We can conceal our thoughts and our deeds from each other, but we cannot conceal even the tiniest thought from the Lord who sees and tests the children of men.

And then verse 5 opens this process up a bit further. It tells us how, in testing us, the Lord distinguishes the righteous from the wicked.

Verse 5, the Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Now, that word righteous, it doesn't mean sinless.

It means those whose sin is forgiven and those who then want to learn how to live a righteous life and a godly life. Whereas the wicked are those who defy God and reject his authority. The righteous are Christians, those who are counted or accounted in God's sight as righteous and forgiven, not because of any innate goodness, but because of Christ's intervention and his death. [15:56] And it's good to know that the Lord tests the righteous. It's an incentive to us to grow, to become more like Christ and to serve him more enthusiastically. Of course the Lord tests his people.

He tests those he loves in the family. He's interested in us. Just as we are concerned to see our children or our grandchildren grow up and develop into increasingly useful citizens, so the Lord observes our behavior carefully because he wants us to grow into more useful Christians. But what about the wicked? Look at verse 5. His soul hates the wicked. Now here's a bit of a surprise.

We've often heard it said that the Lord hates the sin, but not the sinner. But that's not what verse 5 says. David says that the Lord hates the sinner as well as the sin.

He hates the wicked. He hates the one who loves violence. And you'll find that same expression of God hating those who sin against him in many places in the Psalms.

[17:01] I think our problem is that we like to tone down the strength of the Lord's antagonism by separating the sinner from the sin. But the Lord doesn't make that kind of separation. His attitude towards those who defy him is one of settled hostility.

He does love the world. We know that. But he hates those who are, in a settled way, rejecting his authority. And we'll never really understand the gospel unless we see that the Bible teaches that God loves and that God hates.

He loves his people who have been redeemed by Christ. If we belong to Christ, we're part of the beloved. We're loved for Christ's sake. But he hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Jesus says something which chimes in with this, that ultimately he is going to have to say to those who have rejected him, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

I never knew you. I never knew you because you refused to know me. That's the logic of it. So, the Lord rules securely.

[18:07] The Lord sees clearly. And now thirdly, the Lord judges rightly. And verses 6 and 7 powerfully describe the two destinies of the righteous and the wicked.

It is a most dramatic distinction that's made here. Verse 6 tells us about the final destiny of those who reject the Lord. Let him, that's the Lord, let him rain coals on the wicked.

Fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. Now, you might want to say when you read that, isn't David being horrible and bloodthirsty here?

How could any man wish that kind of an outcome on even his worst enemies? But actually, verse 6 is based fairly and squarely on the way that the Lord judges the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapter 19.

We can be sure that David knew his Genesis very well and took Genesis very seriously. He knows that the Lord judged the whole earth with a great flood back in Noah's day.

[19:13] And he knows about the fire and sulfur which the Lord used to rain down upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and to obliterate them. So, David is not cruelly inventing some new kind of torture for God's enemies.

He's simply asking that God should judge his enemies in the way that he judged them back in Abraham's day. In verse 6 here, David is saying to the Lord, please judge your enemies in the way that you did it centuries ago.

You are the judge, so please exercise your judgment. Now, we need, at the most important level, to learn from David here. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we include the phrase, Your kingdom come.

Now, what are we asking for when we say to the Lord, Your kingdom come? We're praying that the Lord Jesus will soon return to exercise his judgment on the day of judgment.

And his judgment will involve separating the sheep from the goats, to use his own picture in Matthew's Gospel. And what does Jesus himself say about the process of separating sheep from goats in Matthew's Gospel?

[20:23] These are his words. The king will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

And finally, says Jesus, These ones will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. Now, let's look at verse 7 in our psalm, because this final verse describes the wonderful and glorious destiny of those who belong to the Lord and who have had their sins forgiven.

Verse 7, For the Lord is righteous. He loves righteous deeds. The upright shall behold his face. Now, David, remember, is a prophet, and he begins to explain what the New Testament brings out more clearly and fully.

And that is that the destiny of the righteous is to see, to behold, the face of the Lord himself. You might just like to turn over the page to Psalm 17.

Let me read the last verse of Psalm 17. 17, 15, this is. As for me, says David, talking to the Lord, I shall behold your face in righteousness.

[21 : 37] When I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. And when he says, when I awake, he doesn't mean when I wake up tomorrow morning. He means when I wake up at the resurrection of the dead.

David is assuring the believing reader that our final destiny is to look up into the face of the Lord himself. Remember the words of Paul the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 13.

Now, he says, we see as in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. If we're Christians, let's train ourselves to think often and to think with longing and anticipation of that wonderful destiny, to see the Lord's face.

And as we read in the book of Revelation, when we see his face finally, he will take the divine handkerchief, if I can call it that, and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes, all memory of the pain and sorrow of life.

So the Lord judges rightly. He makes this great distinction. Verse 6, fire and sulfur for the wicked. It's a picture of hell. Verse 7, for the upright, for the forgiven man or woman, we shall behold his face.

[22 : 50] Now, this great separation, this separation between those who belong to the Lord and those who resent him and reject him, that's the great divide that runs right the way through the Bible.

And we shan't understand the gospel unless we grasp this great separation between belief and unbelief, between heaven and hell. But although it is so fundamental to the Bible, it's often not taught in churches today.

Why should many preachers be silent about something which is so central to the Bible's teaching about God? Why in so many churches do we hear that God loves, but not that God hates?

Well, the reason I think is that there is a cluster of biblical truths which the human heart is naturally unwilling to accept. First, there's the truth about the anger of God against sin and against the sinner. And people say, I don't like to think of God as angry. But the truth is that if God does not express his settled hostility to human sin, we've made him into an immoral God, a God who doesn't care how human beings behave.

[24 : 09] Of course he's going to be angry with human sin. And those who refuse to bow before him. Then the second truth to be rejected is the truth about the cross.

If God is not angry with human sin, Jesus cannot have gone to the cross to bear the penalty of God's anger against sinners. So the cross, according to this way of thinking, is merely an example of how to bear unjust suffering.

According to this view, it doesn't objectively alter the relationship between God and his people. It doesn't affect reconciliation or bring peace. It doesn't deal with the problem of our sin.

It just serves as a human example of how to behave in the face of violence. But that's not what the cross means. It is an objective transaction. It's the place at which the penalty of our sins, the wages of sin, is borne for us by Jesus.

And then the third truth to be rejected is the truth that is so plainly shown here in verses 6 and 7, that God makes this eternal distinction between those who reject him and those who trust him.

[25 : 19] And you know how people today say, but how could God reject anybody? A loving God. I like to think of him as a God who will welcome everybody into his kingdom at the end. Now the glory of the gospel is that God will welcome everybody into his kingdom who is willing to repent, to acknowledge sin and confess it, and then trust in Christ.

But he's not willing to welcome those who turn away from him and refuse to have him rule over them. If we harden our hearts against him, we seal our fate.

We become the wicked of verse 6, and their destiny becomes our destiny. We shall only understand the gospel properly if we understand what our Lord Jesus has rescued us from. He hasn't just saved us from selfishness or from psychological problems or from personal immaturity. He has saved the believer from the anger of God and from the reality of hell. And once we realize that, we realize what a very great Savior, our Savior is. to return to David then and his position.

[26 : 32] He can face difficulty and pressure. He has no need to run away and hide or to bury his head in the sand because he knows that God has everything under control.

He rules securely from his throne in heaven. He sees clearly the motives and the character of men and women, and he judges rightly. None of us is by nature or by effort righteous or upright. We're all sinners by birth and by practice. But once we turn to Christ, once we know that our sins are forgiven and that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is ours by grace, we then have this wonderful assurance given to us in verse 7 that the Lord himself is righteous and that in the end, the upright, those who belong to him, shall see his face.

Well, let's bow our heads and thank him. We thank you, dear Heavenly Father, for the perfection of your justice and righteousness and love.

We thank you that because you are a moral God and the author and source of all right judgment, all right morality, your mind and heart are set against sin.

[27 : 53] But we thank you that because you have loved your people so much, you sent one, your own son, to save us from your righteous anger. Indeed, to bear it in our place, to absorb it so that he himself was put to death for our sins but then gloriously raised.

So we thank you, dear Father, and we pray that you will write into our hearts ever more deeply this glorious gospel of salvation and that we might be able, like David, to tell others about it.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.