

Real Hope in a Perplexing World

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning, and you'll find that in the book of Psalms and at Psalm number 12. And if you have one of the blue church visitors Bibles, I think that is page 452.

And we're going to read together this brief Psalm. I should have mentioned perhaps the notice also in the sheets there with details about our various student things that we'll be beginning shortly. Andy Ritson, one of our staff, is going to say a little word about that this evening at the service at 6.30. And there'll be much more about that in the next week or two. But Psalm number 12, which we're told is to the choir master.

That means it's a song not just to be read, but to be sung. Psalm number 12, according to the Shemeneath. Probably some musical direction about the tune. We can't be quite sure. But it is a Psalm of David. And he says, Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone. For the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.

[1 : 1 0] Everyone utters lies to his neighbor. With flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that makes great boasts.

Those who say with our tongue we will prevail. Our lips are with us. Who is master over us? Because the poor are plundered. Because the needy groan.

I will now arise, says the Lord. I will place him in the safety for which he longs. The words of the Lord are pure words.

Like silver refined in a furnace on the ground. Purified seven times. You, O Lord, will keep them. You will guard us from this generation forever.

On every side the wicked prow. As vileness is exalted among the children of man. Amen.

[2 : 1 3] May God bless to us his word. I'll please do turn to Psalm 12. I caused great panic this morning at Calvin Grove when I said Psalm 11 by mistake.

So it's Psalm 12. And we'll spend a few moments together in this psalm this morning. The Christian life is not one in which the head is planted firmly in the sand.

Perhaps that's what you feel like doing sometimes. The world is moving too fast in a direction you don't like. And you just want to get off. Perhaps that's how you feel.

I know those thoughts creep into my head from time to time. You observe the world around you. And you feel very much at odds with what you see there. What you hear.

Whether it's the attitudes to marriage and sex or to gender. Whatever it might be. It's tempting to feel that you want to plant your head firmly in the sand.

[3 : 2 5] But that is not the Christian life. Which is not to say that the opposite is true either. The Christian life is not blind optimism. But rather it is realistic.

And this psalm this morning is profoundly realistic. It expresses perhaps better than we do. Our feelings. Our emotions as we look out on the world around us.

As we observe the world of men. And as we do it. It doesn't always fill our hearts with joy does it? We can quite often feel isolated.

Alone as Christians. And that is exactly David's experience as he penned this psalm. His heart is heavy. As he observes the children of men.

As he hears their words. Which are deceptive. Lying. Flattering words. This is very much a psalm of lamentation.

[4 : 2 2] As someone put it. This is the sort of psalm to be sung alone. On a barren Scottish moor. As the dusk sets. And as the fog rolls in.

David observes. Perhaps as you do. The lies spoken so freely in society. And he feels. The isolation of faith. And so he calls out.

To the Lord. For salvation. But strangely. And perhaps to our surprise. The psalm doesn't end up. Where we think it ought to end up. Usually we would expect the pattern to move from darkness. To light. From despair. To delight. But that is not the pattern here. In fact the psalm ends up exactly where it begins. Look at verse 1.

David says. The faithful have vanished. From among the children of men. And look down to verse 8. On every side. The wicked prowl. As vileness.

[5 : 22] Is exalted among the children of men. Doesn't our experience. Match David's. The world that you will walk out into. Into the service.

Is very much like the one you left. 45 minutes ago. No. And David is absolutely realistic about that. But what has changed.

Is his perspective. And I trust ours too. As we spend some time in the psalm this morning. Our eyes are lifted. As we come to his word. God speaks into our lives.

And that changes everything. Because the Bible tells us. How things really are. And that gives us real. Solid hope. In a world where.

As Ralph Davis puts it. In a world where the spin doctors win. So let's look more closely. At our psalm in three parts. So part one. We live.

[6 : 16] For the moment. In a world of lies. Two. We belong. Forever. To the God of truth. And thirdly. We are a people. Living a paradox.

So firstly then. We live. For the moment. In a world of lies. David observes. The world of men. And he laments.

Now this isn't a personal lamentation. This isn't a personal crisis. But rather. It's a wider societal issue. He observes. He looks out. On the children of men. And he laments.

This is something out there. Amongst the children of men. Which for David. Has personal implications. He feels alone. And in particular. It's the words of men.

That is the problem. Notice all the speech related language here. Uttering lies. Flattering lips. Speaking from a double heart. And the first thing David mentions.

[7 : 16] Is the impact that seeing this. Has had on him. Verse one. David feels isolated. Fearful even. The godly one is gone.

The faithful have vanished. From among the children of men. And as believers. Isn't it the case. That we see more clearly. And feel more keenly.

The real tragedies. Of the world around us. We discern more readily. Perhaps. The propaganda. The lies. Because God has in his word. Revealed.

His plans. And his purposes. For the world. God. And so we know. The heights. From which creation has fallen. We know the glory. Of the promised new creation.

Which is yet to be. And so we feel. And understand. The depths. To which the world around us. Has plummeted to. Perhaps more so than others.

[8 : 11] And it grieves us. And rightly so. And at times. It can be overwhelming. Can't it? The untruth. That comes from every angle.

Whether it's the deceit. And dishonesty. Of a co-worker. Or it's the lies. Spoken as truth. In the media. The propaganda. That flies.

In the face. Of scientific consensus. Just think about. The recent debates. Around gender fluidity. In particular. In relation to children. Scant regard. Is paid.

For the scientific. Scientific data. And it's data. That would urge. Extreme caution. That's ignored. Play down. Because. There's a greater ideology.

To be one. We are post-truth now. Aren't we? It doesn't matter. What the science says. If it disagrees. My ideology. We'll just go on with it. That is the world. We live in. Isn't it? I was reading the psalm.

[9 : 08] Some weeks ago. And it summed up. Perfectly. Just how I was feeling. At the time. And I'm sure. Many of you. Are feeling this week. In the aftermath. Of Jacob Rees-Mogg. The MP. He was on TV.

This week. Making comments. About marriage. Abortion. And his comments. Were orthodox. Christianity. But he was labelled a bigot. Hounded by the liberal press.

Anyway. Some weeks ago. I was reading the psalm. And it was the week that. The Google employee. Wrote that memo. Do you remember that? He wrote a memo. About diversity. In the company. And he lost his job.

For it. I read a good chunk. Of what he wrote. It's quite a long memo. But I read some of it. And what I read. Seemed to me. To be perfectly reasonable. He was making observations. About the general strengths. And weaknesses. Of men and women. And their attitude. For certain types of work. And what he said. Was backed up. By lots of data. Lots of research.

[10:03] But the problem was. He wasn't towing. The liberal elite line. In relation to gender. And stereotypes. And the response. From Google. Was telling. His views.

Were not acceptable. He was fired. And instead of the truth. Prevailing. Instead of common sense. Prevailing. Lies are uttered. People speak.

From a double heart. Other examples. Abound. The redefinition. Of marriage. Religious pluralism. The unquestioned.

Tolerance. Of Islam. Just imagine. If. Some prominent. Islamic believer. Had said. What Jacob Rees-Mogg. Said this week. I very much doubt. He had been labeled.

A bigot. It comes at us. All the time. Through the television. We watch. The news. We read. The politicians. We elect. Lies.

[10:56] Put forward. As truth. Verse two. Sums up. Exactly. What we observe. What I observe. Every day. What you observe. Too. In society at large. Everyone.

Utters lies. To his neighbor. With flattering lips. And a double heart. They speak. And as we see this. As we watch it. As we hear it.

We feel quite alone. Am I the only one left? Can feel very intimidating. Can't it? But perhaps it's closer to home.

That you observe the lies of men. Maybe it's in a personal relationship. Gone wrong. That you've witnessed the lies. The double heartedness. Perhaps from those. Who you least expect it.

How could they be so deceitful? It rattles us. You feel like you're alone. Disappointed. Am I the only one left. Who sees this for what it is?

[11:58] Look down at verse 4. It sums up. So well. The attitudes that we see all around us. Whether in society in general. Or in the lives of those that we know well. With our tongue.

We will prevail. Our lips are with us. Who is master. Over us. It's the bold assertion of self-sovereignty.

It's the claim of authority and autonomy. And it's matched with. The utter and outright rejection. Of any external authority. Who is master.

Over us. I can say what I like. I can live. Just as I want to live. Who will dare tell me. How I can use my body.

Who will dare tell me. Who I can and can't love. Who will dare define my gender for me. I and I alone. Am the master of my fate. That is the mantra. That is the dogma of the day.

[12:56] Isn't it? And it's lies. And it's lies that can make the believer feel quite alone. But they are lies that are exposed.

Verse 5. Because the poor are plundered. Because the needy groan. I will now arise. Says the Lord. This is what all the untruth and the lies results in.

The poor plundered. The needy groaning. And it is often the poorest. Who pay the price of society's lies. Isn't it? In his book.

A better story. Glenn Harrison makes the telling observation. That those who are suffering most. In our society. As a result of the sexual revolution. Particularly. With the easing of divorce laws.

Are not those who drove it forward. It's not those in the universities. And the political elite. Who are suffering. It's the poor. It's the poor who are paying the price. We see that all around us.

[13:55] Broken homes and families. And the outcomes of children from broken backgrounds. Are generally far worse. The lies of the sexual revolution.

Promised freedom. But it's delivered plundering. And groaning. And it's the less well off. Who are bearing the brunt of the cost. We live in a world of lies.

Observes David. He feels the isolation. Of society's lies. He describes it for us. And he exposes it. And he does the only thing that he can.

And it's the one thing that you and I must do. It's that cry in the very first word of the psalm. Save. Save oh lords. The plea in verse 3.

Cut off all flattering lips. The tongue that makes great boasts. We call out to our God to rescue us. From the lies all around us.

[14 : 55] And David gives us great assurance here in verses 5 and 6. And this is our second point. Yes we live in a world of lies. But.

We belong forever to the God of truth. I will now arise says the Lord verse 5. I will place him in the safety for which he longs.

The words of the Lord are pure words. Like silver refined in a furnace on the ground. Seven times. God promises. Rescue.

Salvation. Safety. What sweet words of comfort they are for the believer who feels alone as David does. He longs for safety and the Lord provides it.

And his is a promise quite unlike the promises of the children of men. Verse 6 is emphatic isn't it? God's words in contrast to the lies of men are utterly trustworthy.

[15 : 53] He will do just as he says. There's no double talk with God. No deceit. His words are pure. Like purified silver.

Verse 7 says. Ye O Lord will keep them. That is. The Lord will keep his words. And without this as a foundation. There is nothing.

If the Lord is not a keeper of promises. If his words are not pure. If he is unable to keep them. Then there's nothing. The basis of faith crumbles if God's words are proved feeble.

But God's words are trustworthy. And true. And powerful. That is the testimony of the Bible from beginning to end. God is a keeper of promises. His words are true.

So when all around us. Seems deceptive. When the words of men we dare not trust. His words stand firm. And David stood firm in them.

[16 : 53] Because he knew God was trustworthy. And don't we. Don't you and I have even more reason. To trust God's words. Don't we have even more reason.

To seek safety. In his promises. Yes. We experience the same isolation of faith. That David experienced. That we look back. On the word of God.

Become flesh. We look back. On promises fulfilled. The serpent crusher promise in Genesis 3 has now come. The one who had crushed the father of lies has now come.

We have. A risen savior. And that very fact brings great certainty for you and I. Every promise of his word will come to pass.

And so you and I have absolute certainty about eternal salvation. And the silencing of lying lips. As we trust God. He will do it.

[17 : 50] And that's David's perspective isn't it. Second half of verse 8. You will guard us from this generation forever. And that is the cry of faith.

That is the basis of faith. In the midst of life's trials. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness. We cry out to God. And he promises eternal security.

We trust him to provide us. And we do so. Because faith is the assurance of things hopeful. It's the conviction of things unseen.

And so despite what you and I might see around us. No matter how you might feel. You know there's more. The visible world is not all there is. We have his words.

We have his promises. And they are true. They are pure. And in them alone. And see most brightly and fully in the Lord Jesus.

[18 : 51] We have a real and lasting security and safety. And what a huge relief that is for us. For you. For me. To have a God who speaks truth.

Friends we know that in the midst of all the untruth. And deception. That we live and breathe every day. We know that we have a steadfast God who will keep us safe. We belong forever.

To the God of truth. Now wouldn't that be a great place to finish? But this is not a seven verse psalm. Verse eight.

Throws a spanner in the works of my nice two point sermon. And so here's point three. We are a people. Living a paradox. Let me read verses seven and eight again.

You oh Lord will keep them. That is you will keep your words. You will guard us from this generation forever. On every side the wicked prowls.

[19 : 56] As vilest is exalted among the children of men. Yes. God preserves us. Yes. We know our eternal future secure.

But dishonesty. Still rules the day. As we leave church this morning. Having spent half an hour in Psalm 12. The world will still look very much the same.

As it did an hour ago. Lies will still be uttered. We will still feel the isolation of faith. But the Bible is refreshingly realistic. Because it describes the world as it really is.

And so here in verse eight. David seems to begin where. Seems to end where he begins. The wicked prowls. Vileness is exalted.

And doesn't that just sum up so well. What we see day to day. Every week. And our experience. Of the world. Seems to undercut. What we've just read about here.

[20 : 56] Our experience. In the day to day. Doesn't seem to correlate. With what we've just read. But this Psalm. Is teaching us. By concluding in the way that it does.

That we are a people. Who presently live. A paradox. God's promises of rescue. And security are true. But we don't for the moment. Fully experience them.

The victory of true words. Is not instant. And you need to know that. We need to get that firmly. Into our thinking. As one preacher put it.

Even the pure words. Which promise safety. And wake the response of faith. Do not wholly scatter the clouds. We will. Have to live.

Amongst the lies. And double talk. And violence. Of the children of men. And we'll do so. Until Christ returns. But why?

[21 : 55] Why must we be a people. Who live a paradox? It would be so much better. If we didn't have to. Why? Well it's primarily because.

Of the patience. And grace. Of the Lord. Christ. With his life. Death. Resurrection. Ascension. Has begun. The fulfillment.

Of all that was promised. In the scriptures. But it's not yet complete. We are waiting. For him to return. And claim his kingdom. We don't yet live.

In the new creation. The great future. Spoken of in Revelation 21. Is not yet. We wait. There is a delay. But it is a gracious delay.

Yes. In many ways. It's a painful delay. For those who are Christ. Because it means. That we don't yet experience. All that we will experience. One day. And it does mean that.

[22 : 50] For as long as we wait. God's people. Will always have reason. To sing and sing again. Psalm 12. But it is a gracious delay. For all who are not yet Christ's.

He is calling today. Rebellious people. Lying people. Those who boldly declare. Who is master over us. He's calling them. Even today. To repent.

To turn. Once again to him. And so. The fact that we observe. Lies all around us. And we feel the pain.

And the isolation that brings. That should not cause us to doubt. For a moment. The sure and certain salvation. That God has promised for his people. The evil that you and I observe.

Does not undermine. For a moment. The eternal safety of God's people. And what a great encouragement to us.

[23 : 48] To know that in God's word. We have the truth. When all around us. Is lies. And people will know that. People are searching for truth.

And so what we hold on the gospel. Is remarkable. All the confusion. Coming through the sexual revolution. All the confusion surrounding gender. People are looking. For something solid.

And real. And that is what we hold out. So be encouraged. As we witness to the truth. People are looking for it. So let's be as realistic.

As the Bible is. About life. In the present world. As the Bible is. But let's also be as hopeful. As the Bible is. As it looks forward. To eternal security. And calls us to trust.

God's pure words. So yes we live. In a world of lies. Yes we feel the isolation that brings.

[24 : 50] But we have great hope. Solid hope. Of eternal security and salvation. Let's not be naive. That as we wait for Christ's return.

We will have to live a paradox. Let me close. By reading the words. From a minister. From Manchester. From the mid 19th century.

Alexander McLaren. Speaking about this psalm. He says this. But even when. Such an outlook saddens. The soul that has been.

In the secret place. Of the most high. And has heard the words. Of his mouth. Will not fall. Into pessimistic despondency. Nor think. That the faithful fail. Because the wicked strut.

When tempted to wail. I. Even I only am left. Such a soul. Will listen. To the still. Small voice. That tells of seven thousands. Of God's hidden ones.

[25 : 46] And will be of good cheer. As knowing that God's men. Can never cease. So long. As God continues. All those great words.

Of realism. And comfort. For the Christian. Who feels isolated. Let me pray. Our heavenly father. We. Thank you once again. For. Your word. Which. Is. So ever. Relevant. Relevant. And. Speaks into. Our day to day lives. And we thank you. That amidst all. The lies that we hear. We see.

Day to day. Your word stands firm. It tells us what is true. And it gives us great realism.

[26 : 51] And so would you help us. To be a people that. Walk by faith. And not by sight. How hard it is. To go against what we see.

When it makes us feel so lonely. So isolated. But lift our eyes to what is true. And enable and equip us. To be a people who walk by faith.

For we ask it for your name. And your sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.