

Hope, when we're Surrounded. (Ps 12)

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If our lives, we often find ourselves in situations where we are different than everyone around us. God has created all of us (in His own image) but each with unique characteristics and personalities. We appear different, we sound different, we have different ways of looking at things, different ways of dealing with the pressures of life, and on the broader scale humanity lives in all sorts of different places and speaks untold numbers of different languages in hundreds of different cultures and countries across the globe and throughout history. And while these differences are a glorious testament to our creator, they can make us feel uneasy, and out of place from time to time. I've had several opportunities to visit other countries, some in a military capacity, some in a ministry context, and a couple while on vacation as a kid. Each of those situations created (at one time or another) the feeling of being isolated and out of place (oddly enough while surrounded by people). In each situation I didn't know the language so I barely knew what was being talked about and felt completely in the dark. On top of that I was a foreigner in another country, so the nationality and cultures weren't mine either. Suffice it to say I was completely surrounded by people but felt absolutely alone. Now I bring this up because at some point everyone feels this way. Some folks deal with it better than others but deep down we all know the feeling of being isolated while surrounded. But if we stopped there then we would only be talking about personal fears and feelings. What about when the people surrounding us actually don't like us at all. When it's not just a feeling anymore but people are taking actions against us force us to change or just plain beat us into submission. When the differences between us mean that they hate us. They hate how we look, they hate what we say, they hate how we view the world around us, they just hate everything about us that's different from them... and to top it all off they are in the stronger position. Then it's a bit different isn't it. Now you're surrounded and feel out of place but you're also being attacked on every side because you're different. This situation is way worse. Here there isn't just a feeling of insecurity there is real danger. And just like before we want to get away from it all, but there's nowhere to run, and there's nowhere to hide. That's the situation David was thinking about when he wrote Psalm 12. He found himself living in a powerful world full of lies and oppression. A world that hated God, hated God's Word, and hated everything and anyone who stood in their way. And you know what? As Solomon (David's son) would say "there's nothing new under the sun"... We live in the same world David lamented in Psalm 12. And in this context, nothing has changed. So this morning lets walk through Psalms 12 together, and find hope when we're surrounded by the presence of sin. If you would like to follow along with me as we read you'll find Psalms 12 on page # 442 of the bibles under the seats in front of you.

Please stand for the reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word... (Read Psalms 12)

Now the first thing I want us to notice is the type of Psalm we're dealing with here. It's a Lament or a righteous expression of grief. We've covered many of these types of psalms recently and this one will follow the same general pattern of others we're already familiar with. It will

start with a turning or cry to the Lord (which we'll see in a moment in verse 1), then there will be a complaint, then a request, and finally it will end with trusting in the promises of God. As a result I'm going to move through the sermon following that pattern which will be shown on the screen behind me. So, if you drift off to sleep, and come to before I'm finished and you're wondering where we are... We'll be following the pattern of cry, complain, request, and trust. So, let's get started...

As I eluded to a moment ago, David begins Psalms 12 with a cry to Lord for help. In all it's only three words. "Save, O LORD". Now I'm really pretty terrible with grammar. I may be able to use it, but I have no idea what all the different parts of a sentence are or do anymore. So, like all fathers who have school age kids who are studying stuff I forgot a long time ago I decided to ask my kids to help me out. Here's what they came up with... "Save, Oh LORD" is an imperative statement that serves as the main clause (for the rest of the sentence) with a subject that is understood to be you. Save is a verb, Oh is an interjection, and LORD is a proper noun. Who would have guessed??? The crazy part is, that's just the beginning, because there is actually an eternity of significance in those same three words. David was the inspired author so of course the subject (in context) was David. Which means he knew who he was. Or maybe more to the point he knew who he wasn't. He knew he wasn't strong enough, or smart enough to do it himself. If he thought he could pull it off on his own, he wouldn't be asking someone else for help. This is where I have to admit that sentence structure and grammar are helpful... Without my kids helping I would have missed this absolutely vital point. Only people who know their limitations ask for help. As Jesus said "Those who are well have no need of a physician". How many times have I brought my problems to the Lord while already planning on how I'm going to fix them? How many people never turn to the Lord for salvation because they don't think they are all that bad. Suffice it to say, we are all absolute weaklings. Or as Martin Luther put it... "we are all beggars, this is true". The bible teaches that it really doesn't matter who you are. You may be young, or old, a Christian, or an unbeliever... at the end of the day we are all dependent on God's grace for absolutely all of our physical and spiritual needs, and realizing that fact about ourselves is absolutely essential to receiving help from the Lord. After all, scripture says "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble". Here we have an example of David humbly crying out for help, and really much more than help. He wants Salvation. Make no mistake David is not asking for things to just get a little bit better, or for a chance to catch his breath before the next round starts... He's asking to be saved completely from the problem. This will be important later so don't forget. David wants everything to be 100% fixed, and he knows where to turn for help. He turns and directs his cry for salvation to the LORD himself why??? Because God's word proclaims "Salvation belongs to the LORD". If your sink is leaking you call a plumber, if your house is on fire you call the fire department, if you need salvation you cry out to the LORD. This is no place for a do it yourself job you learned from a self help book, some youtube video, or the empty promises of another religion... As Peter said "... there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved". "Salvation belongs to the LORD" and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (the incarnate Son of God) was the only one

powerful enough to accomplish our salvation. He took the full weight of my sin on himself and then endured the full wrath of a holy and righteous God in my place. As the hymn writer put it

“O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!

Our load was laid on Thee;

Thou stoodest in the sinner’s stead,

Didst bear all ill for me.

A Victim led, Thy blood was shed;

Now there’s no load for me.”

Praise that LORD that when we like David understand our weakness, and cry out to God for salvation, we’ve come to the right place.

But all that only got us three words (and one assumed subject) into our psalm, and there’s still 142 more words to go in the chapter. If you run the numbers that would mean we have just shy of 12 hours left in the sermon, so I’ll have to pick up the pace a little to get you out of here by midnight. Hopefully you remember that the pattern is Cry, Complain, Request, and Trust. So, lets jump back into verse 1 and look at David’s complaint to God. He starts with a broad statement that the godly and faithful are nowhere to be found. Which sounds a lot like Elijah when he made a similar complaint, to which the LORD revealed that he had “kept for *himself* seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal”. We’re dealing with the same complaint here. It’s not that there are none of God’s people in the world, it’s that the godly and faithful are not sitting out in plain sight with the authority and power to change the world around them. Instead, who seems to be shaping and controlling David’s world? Liars, Flatterers, and Fakes. And notice too that it’s not a small problem that’s tied to one or two people. It’s rampant, it’s everywhere, it’s the air David is breathing and the water he’s swimming in. The world around him, is obsessed with manipulating people with lies, and flattery. It’s gotten so bad that even if they were to say something true it would come from a heart that doesn’t actually care about truth at all. The picture David paints is a culture completely devoid of honesty, humility, and love. A culture that uses words to control one another rather than build one another up. Oddly enough, a culture just like ours. Brothers and Sisters, nothing has changed. Sin then is sin now, and the heart of a sinner has always been “deceitful above all things, and desperately sick”. Think about it for a moment. We live in an age (just like David) characterized by lies, flattery and twisted truth. Life is defined in such a way so that we can kill babies in the womb, love is defined in such a way that we can abandon God’s plan of one Man and one Woman, to be any combination we want. While on the topic of Men and Women our culture twists even the created definition of it to fulfill their endless lusts. Our politician’s (on both sides of the isle) lie, flatter, and twist the truth to get elected and stay in power. It goes on and on and on... And as the

narrative of lies spreads throughout the land it infects every facet of our lives. The Ad's, shows, movies, books, classes, news, parenting advice, medical practice, government and laws, where you buy your groceries, who makes your groceries, and absolutely everything else seems bent on selling sin as truth, and manipulating people into agreeing with it. We (like David) feel like we are drowning in a sea of sinful words, all being used to bend us into the shape of the world. It's a complaint that has been true from the moment Satan tempted Eve in the Garden all the way up until this very moment. We live in a world of lies, and the pressure that puts on the people of God is intensely felt. So, what does David do now that he's voiced his complaint? Does he just wallow in self pity, reminiscing about a fanciful past that wasn't like this, or perhaps he'll go to the other extreme and start stocking up on weapons, digging bunkers, daring the world to set foot on his property. Or maybe he'll decide to go on the offensive and seek the political power to put an end to the culture of lies once and for all. Oddly enough he doesn't do any of that here. Instead, he asks the Lord to take care of it, which brings us to third phase of a godly lament. The request...

Look back at verses 3 and 4 with me again (Read). David's request is for the LORD to "cut off all flattering lips..." That language means he wants these people carved out of and discarded. Just like a surgeon cuts out cancerous cells from a sick patient, here David is asking God to preform a surgery on the nation of Israel in order to preserve its life. David knows that if this situation continues then under the terms of the old covenant judgment will eventually fall on everyone. It's the same situation that happened over and over again throughout Israel's history. I've been listening to the Bible on the way back and forth to work and I'm almost done with the book of Joshua right now. What's been overwhelmingly apparent is that sin that spread to the culture had to be rooted out and destroyed or God would bring judgement on the entire nation. And that's exactly what's at stake here. Sinful men are using sinful speech to gain power through manipulation and then use that power to oppress the people. Look at how much pride drips from their lips in verse 4. Essentially, they are saying I'm so good at lying and manipulating people I've become invincible, I can do anything I want... no one can stop me... I'm not accountable to anyone. In their pride these leaders and cultural influencers have forgotten that they are accountable to God's law, and warnings like the one found in Deuteronomy not to oppress the poor lest "he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin". And apparently that's exactly what's been going on because the LORD responds to David's request in verse 5 with "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." Here God communicates exactly what is happening and exactly what he plans to do about it. It must have been a tremendous encouragement for David, both to know that God heard his prayer, agreed with his assessment of the situation, and promised to intervene. So, let's consider the LORD's response. First he agrees with David that his law has been broken and that judgment is warranted. When God says "I will now arise" it doesn't mean he was lounging on a celestial couch somewhere and had to get up to sort out an argument between the kids in another room. God is never passively disengaged with his creation

like we are when we zone out with our phones. Rather when we see this language in the Bible it communicates, he is coming to in power to bring judgement. And that is a terrifying thing. The next thing to notice is who stands to benefit from God's judgement here... Well, it's the first and foremost David, but also anyone else who shares David's lament here. Look again at the phrase "I will place him in the safety for which he longs". Those people who feel the pressure of sin surrounding them, and long to escape it are promised safety. They are the godly ones, the faithful who are being oppressed in the land. The souls that long for God like the deer pants for flowing streams, or as Logan preached last week from Psalm 84 the soul that "longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD", that's who the LORD is promising safety. And notice the timing of all of this. When does God promise to act? "I will now arise," "I will place him..." God is not going to drag his feet here. The request was urgent, and the response matches that urgency. God is imminently about to act. It hasn't happened yet but it's coming right away. Brothers and Sisters, I can't build this up any longer... This is fantastic news for us!!! Sin has been present with humanity since the Garden of Eden, and every generation of Gods people throughout time have suffered under the weight of it. Satan "the father of lies" has been active in our world oppressing the godly and faithful by suppressing the truth and manipulating mankind. The world itself has been in open rebellion to God's rule ever since the garden, and humanities own flesh is "dead in trespasses and sins" such that our very being is corrupt and wars against all that is holy. But God has answered the lament of his people. As it says "when the fullness of time had come, God send forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." You see the cross was the fulfilment of the first half of verse 5. While David was primarily concerned with invoking the curse on the flattering lips of his day to preserve the people of God, God's answer not only provided temporary relief through targeted judgement in David day. It provided the means of permanent relief by transferring the judgement of the curse from believers to Christ on the cross. As it says in Galatians "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree""! So if you're here this morning, and you have not accepted the terms of the new covenant by placing your faith in the perfect Son of God who became a curse for you. Then you are still under the curse of God. As it's written "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Turn and cry out to God for salvation right now, before it's too late. Don't listen to the lies of Satan that make you think God doesn't want you to come. God loves you! Believe it and come. Don't listen to the lies of this world that tell you there is so much fun you could have first, and God is a restrictive kill joy. Every good and perfect gift comes from God. He knows what's best for you and wants to give it to you. Believe it and come. Don't listen to the lies in your own heart that tell you don't actually need any help. The bible says you are "dead in your trespasses and sins" ... you desperately need God to give you new life. Believe it and come. God is offering salvation to you this morning, Believe it and come!

Well if Christ is the fulfillment of the first half of verse 5, what are we to do with the second half. I would submit that the second half is already here but not yet. You see in one sense God's people; Christians couldn't be any safer than they are right now. Paul lists every imaginable thing that could threaten our relationship with God only to conclude that absolutely nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." But just a few verses earlier he says that all Christians "groan inwardly as we wait for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies". I think this is what is in view when God promises to "place him in the safety for which he longs". This morning we've spent a lot of time talking about the realities of living in a sin cursed world. But there is coming a day when God promises to place us forever in the safety for which we long. A day when not only the penalty of sin is paid by Christ, and the power of sin is broken in us, but the very presence of sin will be no more. Because God has promised to remove us from this present world and place us forever in his presence. That is the hope of every believer. That one day "we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is", "and so we will always be with the Lord." That's the hope that gives us strength to endure the presence of sin now. Because God has promised to take us home.

This brings us to our last point and the last phase in any lament. Trusting. If you remember we started with a Cry, then a Complaint, then a Request, and we just flushed out God's promised response. Now that leaves us to simply trust that things are going to happen exactly the way God has promised they will. Now make no mistake, just because I said this part was simple doesn't mean it's always easy to do. So David responds to God's promise in verse 5 with a statement of fact about the "words of the LORD". Let's read verses 6 and 7 together (Read). Now the language of verse 6 translates a bit funny, but the idea is this. God's words (unlike the lies of this world) are absolutely pure and reliable. The image in the ESV is one of pure silver, that doesn't have any imperfections, fine print, or hidden agendas in it. It is not presenting itself as precious metal while secretly it's tainted by other elements. What you see with God's word is what you get. We understand that there are three main reasons for the trustworthiness of God's word. First the bible teaches that God can't lie. It's just not possible for him to do it because he is by nature Holy and incapable of sin. So, God only says thing he absolutely means. Second God doesn't change. So, it's not like one day in the future he may suddenly decide to sin and break his promises to us. He can't change so there is no risk of him not keeping his word. Lastly God is all powerful and sovereign over everything. That mean that anything he says he will do, he also has the power to do. What we are left with then is an all-powerful, unchanging, holy God whose word can be trusted above everything else. That's why David can say with confidence "You, O LORD, will keep them;" It's a tremendous statement of Trust... But what makes it more amazing is what he goes on to say in the second half of verse 7 into verse 8. He says... (Read). Now I don't know about you, but at first glance that's a bummer of a way to end the Psalm. But it just reinforces what we've already covered. God's promised salvation is both already here, and not yet. David knows that God will act, and that God will preserve his people. But that doesn't mean that there won't be anymore wicked people to look out for. Only that God has promised to guard the godly and faithful while they're here on earth. In some ways that's a bit anticlimactic isn't it.

But that's where this Psalm closes. On a sinful world that exalts every vile practice known to man, surrounding a pocket of God's people. Like the darkness that could be felt in the land of Egypt, while in the middle of it there was light in Goshan. Brothers and Sisters that is our reality, and there's no sense in trying to sugar coat it. It's just the way it is. Rachel often jokes that I'm a pessimist. To which I generally respond no, actually I'm a realist. Do you know what the difference is? A pessimist always thinks the sky is falling... even when it's not... so they live in a bunker, which isn't really living. An optimist never thinks the sky is falling... even when it is... so they die. A realist checks the weather before going outside and acts accordingly. Here at the close of Psalms 12 David is giving us a much needed shot of reality. The world is not spinning out of control as the old pessimist would say. The corruption, vile practices, lies, manipulation, and sin of this world are not like a run away train that will never be stopped. Isaiah writes God "is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers: who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness." Things are not out of control, God is Sovereign. However, we must not make the mistake of the well-meaning optimist either. Believe it or not the world is out to get you. It's corrupt, it can't be reformed by human exertion... no amount of well wishing social work will bring about any lasting change. It doesn't matter if your candidate gets elected, that law is passed or gets shot down, or even what your school board thinks about gender. God may use social government to suppress the symptoms of sin (and it's right and proper to do what we can to support that work), but "salvation belongs to the LORD". As Christians we are not on a happy go lucky crusade to fix the world with acts of love. No rather we are called to be realists. The world as we know it is passing away. It's not going to be fixed... it's going to be judged, and our primary job here on earth is to shine as lights in the midst of darkness for the glory of God and the spread of the gospel. Frankly it's not going to be easy. But the truth is God has promised to preserve us through this time, and we can trust him. Ultimately our hope rests on the fact that God will finish the work he started and one day call us home where we'll forever be with the one our hearts long for eternally free from the presence of sin. In the mean time. This is what Peter has to say "The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

Lets pray...

