

Theme: The Lord alone is our protector and helper against all of the forces against us.

This psalm reflects upon God's watchful protection and care over us in the midst of our enemies and troubles. It affirms that we ought to rely on God alone, completely depending upon him, rather than trusting in our own strategies or looking to others. Rather than going through this psalm verse-by-verse, I'd like to follow the overall movement of the psalm—which I see as alternating between an awareness of the enemies around David the psalmist and a praise of God the deliverer.

Let's look first at the enemies. These could have been real, literal enemies which were actually plotting against David, or they could have been David's impression of the people around him, which seemed as if they were plotting against him. He says that these people were blessing with their mouths but cursing in their hearts; they were plotting to take him out; they loved lies. Sound like anyone you know?

It's true that at any given time in our lives, it may not be that we actually have one or more persons that are actively plotting to take us out. But there are likely people in your life that speak one way to your face and talk another way about you behind your back. There are likely people in your life that would honestly like to see you fail. The enemies in your life may be just a general sense of hostility or indifference that you perceive. It may seem that no one really cares about you. I think that was largely David's situation. Enemies out to get him? At one time he was literally chased throughout Judea by then-King Saul, who truly wanted to kill him.

Whatever the enemies are, they are a part of your world and my world that we have to live with. They may or may not be easy to identify or define. But they're a reality that we have to deal with in some way. The psalmist is honest with his enemies and what they're like. But he doesn't end there.

The emphasis in this psalm is NOT on the enemies; the psalmist does not primarily speak of those who are allied against him. His main concern is not with those who are against him, but with the ONE who is for him. He refers several times to God as his rock, his salvation, his refuge, the rock of his strength. Those are terms that invoke power and absolute protection.

When we are faced with enemies, we are given a choice: to rely upon the Lord as our helper or to look to our own resources. The latter option is the default position of the worldly. It's the reflex that occurs when we're threatened and we seek to resolve our issues by our own resources. When we're threatened at work and so we think about how we can manipulate the situation or how we can spin things in our favor (in this political season, we see a lot of spinning don't we?). When we're threatened financially, we seek to work harder, add another job, refinance, or shift our resources. When our families are threatened, the warrior-instincts kick in and we find ourselves ready for a fight—whether or not that would be the most helpful action. I can think of times that I was ready to fight for my kids because someone else was scolding or criticizing them. It wasn't until afterward, in hindsight, that I realized that my kids were in the wrong and needed to be rebuked.

This decision of whether to trust the Lord or rely upon one's own strength was the predicament of Hezekiah when he was threatened by Sennacherib of Assyria. After hearing the threats of Sennacherib, Hezekiah went into the Lord's house, tore his clothes, and spread out the letter before the Lord—almost as if he were showing God the letter and expecting him to read it also. Then Hezekiah

cried out to the Lord.

The tendency to seek one's own preservation through self-reliance is the most fundamental worldly and sin-saturated attitude there is. That tendency is what led the first man and woman to distrust God's word and to follow their own inclinations. Every sinful decision by any person ever since has followed in that same pattern, where people have simply followed what they wanted to do and relied upon their own understanding, wisdom, ingenuity, strength, charisma, finances. That's the "practical" way. Is there any other way to go about handling a problem or an enemy?

What if there was a different way? Several times in this psalm David writes that "ONLY" God is his rock and his salvation. In times of his crisis, when he felt his troubles gathering all around him, as his enemies were encircling him, David's only option was simply to look to the Lord; he was David's only defense and help. There was no other option left open, no plan B, no other person or resource to turn to.

This is where faith enters the picture. There's no other way to get around that. I understand that in the worldly context, that word involves sort of a cute, ridiculed nuance. People speak of faith as if it's an irresponsible or ignorant, or at least unintelligent, way to go about handling things. I think today that I'm speaking to the household of faith—that is, those who actually believe that there is an almighty maker and sustainer of the universe that truly cares about each one of us. And so, let me suggest that if we truly believe that, don't you think it makes more sense to depend upon his all-encompassing resources than it does to trust in our puny strength or shadowy knowledge? It all comes down to what we truly believe. If we don't really believe that God exists or that there is any other power in the universe other than that what we can devise, then sure, it does seem irresponsible to cast our problems on the arms of some obscure concept like faith.

We read, "Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him." And David here tells us to "pour out your heart" before the Lord. God isn't like the distant manager that expects us to solve our own problems and not to bring our blubbing and sniveling before him. He invites us to be fully open with him.

When was the last time that you just sat and waited before the Lord? When was the last time you just poured out your heart to him, expressed all that you thought and felt, opened up about what you were going through? We're trained to think by our world that such sobbing is immature, silly, that only emotionally unstable people do such things. May I propose to you that crying out to the Maker and Lord of all things is actually the most rational thing to do?

Hopefully you do have episodes in your life of times that you have honestly and openly cried out to the Lord in the midst of your weakness and vulnerability. I can think of times in my life in which I felt so inadequate, so lonely, so guilty, so weak. In those times I wasn't interested in looking good or impressing anyone with my greatness. I only wanted to cry out in foolish desperation to the only One whom I knew could actually help me and that really cared.

David writes that his salvation and honor depend upon the Lord. This is an absolute reliance in which David says to God, Unless you help me and preserve me, I'm done for. And unless you uphold my name and reputation, I might as well not even try. The language that David uses implies that his salvation and honor are COMPLETELY dependent upon the Lord. There is no other possibility of attaining any security apart from the Lord's help.

This is another way that the way of faith contrasts so greatly with the way of the world. The way of the world is to fight for honor, to scheme and to plot in order to outperform a competitor. Shows like "American Idol" and others feature people desperate to become famous. People dedicate every ounce of energy and talent, hungry for some chance to make their name known, to elevate their honor. In some cultures, people would prefer to die than to become dishonored.

The opposite of this kind of attitude is what David was writing about here. He acknowledged that his honor depended, not on his own abilities, but on the Lord. You want to know how I think this attitude is best exemplified in our own context? I think it's when we're willing to fall back and depend completely upon the Lord, when we're willing to say, "Lord, this is all that I am unless you want to build me up. And if you don't, you don't, and I'm ok with that." Remember, the Lord's ultimate will for you and for me is not that we become famous or well-known or honored in worldly terms.

That means that my honor, my reputation should not be the primary focus of my life. I shouldn't be consumed with a desire to impress others with my appearance, my intelligence, my accomplishments or my credentials. And yet the world is full of people who love to do little else than to air their own petty bragging points. You ever spent an hour with someone who loves to talk about himself or herself? It's miserable. The true definition of humility is not to think lowly of yourself; it's to not be very concerned with yourself at all. The good and noble things that I do, the accomplishments that I make are attributed purely to God's grace. If I fail to receive the recognition and accolades that I think I should, as long as God approves of me, that's all I'm concerned about.

The contour of the psalm reflects back upon those who represent worldly pride and greatness. Whoever they are, their greatness is worthless; on the scales of true estimation, they're counted as exactly nothing. This is, again, a contrast with the worldly view, which categorizes people according to their relative titles, positions, and prestige. As a result, we tend to be enamored with people who have attained such prestige, and to think little of those who haven't.

God has a different view of people. God is little impressed with our categories of prestige. I think that's why Jesus could speak so harshly to the powerful religious and political leaders of his day: he wasn't impressed with who they were. Whether great in this world's eyes or little, their value, their weight equals nothing.