**Apple of your eye**  29/1/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 17, 1John 3

Text: Psalm 17

Psalms: 119:129-136, 39:1-5, 17:1-7, 134a

Most of the psalms are prayers, prayers of David, a man after God’s own heart. Many of his prayers focus on enemies surrounding him, which is understandable because he spent years fleeing the sword of King Saul, and fighting the Philistines. Yet the psalms are not vain repetitions. In no psalm do we detect a mere mouthing of words. We get a sense of originality and urgency as David comes up with new metaphors and word pictures, and new insights into himself and his God. The psalms are full prophecy, as we saw at the end of the previous psalm, and of theology, as we will see at the end of this psalm- with reference to the resurrection.

Psalm 17 begins with David crying to the Lord for justice, for vindication before his enemies. Our first of five subheadings is, ‘Prayer for justice’. Our second subheading is, ‘Prayer for protection’, our third, ‘Picture of the wicked’, our fourth, ‘Plea for God to arise’, and finally, ‘Presence of the Lord’.

**1. Prayer for justice**

‘Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right’ said Abraham when pleading with the Lord to spare Sodom (Gen 18:25). David was praying to the same God, the God who is just in all his ways, and the God who is powerful to bring justice or righteousness to his chosen ones when they cry to him. What father does not delight to hear his child crying out, ‘Help me dad, please!’ And that loving dad will run to help his child. Mind you, it is not always easy for dad to determine who is in the right when two of his children are fighting over a toy! Children are not necessarily as honest as David shows himself to be as he cries to the Lord for justice.

David assures the Lord that his prayer is not from ‘deceitful lips’, or in other words, that he is being honest before the Lord. Knowing that the Lord sees and knows everything, even the thoughts of our hearts (1Sam 16:7), it is utter foolishness to try and hide things from the Lord or make excuses for your sin. David was not without sin of course, but he was ready to confess his sin as he prayed for mercy and forgiveness from the Lord. Confession of sin is an important part of our prayers. Jesus teaches us to pray, ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us’. When you pray this prayer I hope you are not just mouthing these words. If we are not ready to confess our sins before the Lord, there is no point in asking him to save us.

David practiced self-examination, examination of his own heart and life. He prayed, ‘Search me O God, and know my heart, try me and know my anxieties, and see if there is any wicked way in me’ (Ps 139:23, 24). Here in Psalm 17 he says much the same thing: ‘You have tested my heart’. It was in the night, probably on his bed, that David, with God’s help, examined his ways. A guilty heart tends to keep us awake at night- right? Knowing God’s commands, he tested his own heart; we always know God commands when it comes to examining others people’s hearts! (Rom 2:1-3). When David says, ‘You have tried me and found nothing’ (17:3), he is not saying he is sinless but that, as he goes on to say, he has not followed the wicked in misuse of his tongue or his hands.

David acknowledges that the Lord has helped him stay apart from the wicked and their ways, even though David himself had determined not to join the wicked (17:3-5, cf. Ps 1). Certainly the Lord kept David from revenge when he set out to destroy Nabal; God used Abigail to stop him (1Sam 25:23f). So David ‘searched his heart and found assurance that his piety was no pretence’, as he cried for vindication. We know God is Spirit and so did David, but still he speaks of the Lord having ears and eyes because he hears and he sees everything, including things we do not see or hear.

**2. Prayer for protection**

David prayed that the Lord would vindicate him, knowing that the Lord is just and righteous. God’s justice is without partiality of course, so it is important to confess your sin and receive forgiveness before asking the Lord to judge others. When we humbly and sincerely confess, we can be confident that the Lord will forgive us. David prayed with confidence that the Lord would hear him because he knew the covenant love of the Lord, the ‘marvellous loving-kindness’ of the Lord (17:6, 7). The Hebrew word ‘*chesed*’ is often translated ‘mercy’ in our Bible, but here it is ‘lovingkindness’. The covenant love of the Lord is truly marvellous. This is the ‘*agape*’ love, the self-sacrificing love, we see in our Lord Jesus Christ (1John 3:16).

Covenant love is a jealous love. Just as a mother cares for and protects her offspring, so the Lord cares for and protects those who are his, those who trust in him (17:7). And God is all-powerful to do just that. This is the confidence David had as he prayed for the Lord to vindicate him. He knew from his youth not to take revenge himself but to trust the Lord to avenge or vindicate him. David was suffering at the hands of the wicked, of deadly enemies who surrounded him (17:9), but while praying found confidence and comfort in the Lord.

David asked the Lord to keep him as ‘the apple of his eye’ (17:8 cf. Deut 32:10). What does this strange yet beautiful metaphor mean? The ‘apple’ refers to the pupil at the very centre of your eye. The eye is a wonderfully complex part of the body, a part most sensitive to touch and injury. We don’t like being poked in the eye! So to be like the apple of someone’s eye is to be at the centre of their loving attention, like the jealous love that we just mentioned. David asked the Lord to look upon him as his special child, and to feel, as it were, the pain that David felt. Do you think you are the apple of the Lord’s eye? If not why not? This was David’s prayer!

A second metaphor used by David is that of a hen protecting her chicks, which she does by spreading her wings over them. Jesus spoke of the people of Jerusalem in similar terms (Mat 23:37); those who trusted him would indeed find protection in the shadow of his wings, or in the shadow of the cross. Do you find comfort in the shadow of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?

**3. Picture of the wicked**

The theory of evolution devised by Charles Darwin in 1859 includes the principle of the survival of the fittest, but many baulk at this principle being applied to human beings because of Hitler and his policies; although Peter Singer reminds us that this is part of the theory of evolution. Tragically, this theory is applicable where the wicked are concerned, as this psalm and other Scriptures indicate. David pictures the wicked, his enemies and God’s enemies, as lions on the prowl, young lions ready pounce on upon some weak and innocent person (17:12). We don’t have to look at Hitler of course; just look at the prevalence of abortion, and now euthanasia, in our society. The weak are being targeted according to the principle, ‘the survival of the fittest’.

David is referring to ‘deadly enemies who surround him’ (17:9). In this section he broadens his reference to ‘they have now surrounded us’, presumably referring to the godly righteous (17:11). He says of the wicked, ‘They have closed up their fat hearts’ (17:10). This is not a reference to physical stature, although Paul does speak of enemies of the cross, ‘whose god is their belly and whose glory is in their shame’ (Phil 3:19). When David speaks of fat hearts he is referring to insensitivity towards others, to what we call callous hearts. They are focussed totally on themselves, and while some become deadly in the physical sense, many use their mouths, or social media, to assault others. They are people filled with pride, speaking proud and boastful words- along with lots of lies of course. David’s picture of the wicked is continued into the NT by the apostle Peter, who writes of the devil as ‘walking about like a roaring lion’ (1Peter 5:8); the wicked are followers of the devil and his ways.

**4. Plea for God to arise**

As the psalm comes to an end, we hear David intensifying his plea for justice, for vindication from the Lord. ‘Arise, O Lord, confront him and cast him down’ he pleads (17:13). David is speaking to the Lord about bringing the wicked down to death. The Lord did just this with the wicked sons of Eli, and also with King Saul. The Lord can and does deliver justice in this world, and will certainly do so on the Day of Judgment when every human being who has ever lived will stand before him (Heb 4:13). If David pleaded for the Lord to ‘confront and cast down’ the wicked, can we not do the same- being careful to examine our own heart first, as David did, and to consider the Lord’s desire for all men everywhere to repent (2Peter 3:9).

But rather than seeing the wicked brought down, David saw them prospering in this world (17:14). In Psalm 73 the psalmist actually envied the wicked in their prosperity, for a moment. Do we not face the same perplexity and challenge today? We see the rich getting richer, often through corruption and even violence, and ask what the Lord is doing. We may even be praying, ‘Arise, O Lord!’ But notice the reference to ‘this life’, to life in this world, to their belly and their children (17:14). How do you feel when you see people who have no concern for God’s commands and no love for Jesus with a healthy and happy family, living in huge homes and driving expensive cars, while you struggle as you walk in the ways of the Lord? Listen now to the conclusion reached by David in this psalm.

**5. Presence of the Lord**

David’s focus turns from the wicked and their prosperity to the Lord and being in the presence of the Lord. ‘As for me’ he writes, ‘I will see your face in righteousness’ (17:15). His thoughts turn to heaven and to eternity. His citizenship was in heaven, as Paul would say (Phil 3:20), and he was looking forward to the day when he would meet his king. Many migrants to this country recently received their citizenship. Some came as refugees fleeing war or famine, and feel greatly blessed to find a home, a secure home, in Australia.

If your citizenship is in heaven, you share the same hope as David, the hope of seeing your Lord in all his glory. David knew that the Lord is righteous and that no unrighteousness can enter his presence- so no wicked ones in heaven! He also knew that by the grace of God he had been made clean or righteous. David looked to the day when he would awake in the presence of the Lord, and in the likeness of the Lord (17; 15).

David believed in the resurrection and in eternal life, just like Abraham (Heb 11:10, 16), and just as the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches. After death comes the resurrection, and those who belong to God in this life will be raised to see the Lord face to face, and be changed into his likeness (1John 3:2). What a wonderful and glorious future awaits you if you, by grace through faith, are a child of God. ‘As for me, I will see your face’ said David. Do you with confidence say the same thing? Moreover, do you believe that you will awake from death in the likeness of the Lord?