**Protest of innocence and integrity** 17/9/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 26, John 8:42-59

Text: Psalm 26

Psalms: 1, 7:7-11, 139:17-24, 117

Many Christians struggle to find anything about Christ in the Psalms. If you are such a person, please read Psalm 26 carefully and prayerfully. We could almost call it a gospel psalm. One writer refers to it as, ‘Christ’s prayer… an assertion of a life of perfection, and it is by his sinless life and perfect death that we are accepted by God’. This psalm is of course, written by David a long, long time before Jesus came into this world, but Jesus has always been the second person of the Godhead. Moreover, God’s requirement of a blood sacrifice for the redemption of sins was well known to David, even better known than it is today.

Too many Christians find the idea of a blood sacrifice embarrassing, even abhorrent, but one thing David knew, and I hope you know and understand, is that ‘without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness’ (Heb 9:22). I think David, and other men of faith in the OT, knew that the sacrifice of bulls and goats never actually covered their sin. He knew that the sacrifice had to be a son of Adam, a man without sin. David was a man, a man after God’s own heart, but he was not without sin. He claimed to be blameless, a man of integrity, and but clearly was not sinless.

Another thing David knew was that God is judge, the ultimate judge of all people. He begins this psalm saying, ‘Lord, vindicate me’ or, ‘God judge me’. Are you ready to be judged by God? On what basis will God judge us? David knew. God is a righteous judge who will ‘judge the world in righteousness’ (Acts 17:31); in contrast to the judgment of men. David was accused and judged by wicked men, so he appealed to the only righteous judge. We know where we stand with the Lord as our judge. If we are innocent we will be vindicated, but if we are guilty we will be condemned. But how do we now we are innocent? David knew. And it was not only because he trusted in the Lord and lived a blameless life. He lived such a life because the Lord in his mercy reached out and brought him into a covenant relationship with himself. Note the words, ‘redeem’ and ‘mercy’ in verse 11, and the covenant terms in verse 3.

**1. I have walked in my integrity**

David begins by calling on the Lord to vindicate him. It seems he was begin accused, falsely accused, by wicked men. We are not told who these men were, although men like Saul and even his son Absalom come to mind. David fought against many foreigners but it was men within Israel who posed the greatest threat to his life. It was the same with Jesus who was falsely accused and killed by ‘his own’, by the Jews (Acts 2:23, 1Thess 2:15). God vindicated his sinless Son by raising him from the dead on the third day.

David told the Lord that he trusted in him and ‘walked in my integrity’ (26:1). David knew the commandments and sought to obey them- not just sometimes but all the time. Integrity means wholeness in the sense of whole-heartedness or sincerity. To be sincere literally means ‘without wax’. David knew he could not hide anything from God. He lived a transparent life, unlike most people. If you are walking in integrity, and not hiding anything from God or man, you will not get tripped up, or as David says, ‘I shall not slip’ (26:1). How many times do we hear of someone slipping badly or falling because their ‘private’ email or voice recording is revealed? When David sinned he confessed his sin and the Lord forgave him. When his sins were public the public heard his confession. The public certainly heard him praising God after being forgiven, and when he was delivered from his enemies.

‘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). These closing words of Psalm 139 are better known that verse 2 of Psalm 26, but David’s prayer is the same. David examined his own heart but knew how biased self-examination can be. Examination by other men can be biased in the other direction. Only examination by the Lord is unbiased or just.

After David sinned by taking a census, the Lord gave him a choice of three punishments (2Sam 24). He chose punishment at the hands of the Lord rather than punishment at the hands of his enemies because the Lord is merciful. When the apostle Paul was accused by Jews and false teachers within the church he did not accept their judgment but declared, ‘He who judges me is the Lord’ (1Cor 4:4).

David knew the Lord to be just in his judgment but also merciful. He knew he was a covenant child of God; ‘lovingkindness’ translates the word ‘*chesed*’, otherwise translated ‘covenant love’ (26:3). David does not pray to God as his father, but he knew the ‘fatherly’ love of God. The term ‘Yahweh’ or Lord’ is the covenant name of God. David was not in God’s love one day and out the next; ‘*chesed*’ is also translated ‘steadfast love’. His daily life, pictured here as a walk, was walking before the Lord: ‘I have walked in your truth’ or ‘in your faithfulness’ (26:3). David’s vindication ultimately depended not on his ‘walking in my integrity’ but on walking in the truth or faithfulness of the Lord; in other words, on the Lord being faithful to his covenant commands and covenant love.

**2. I have not sat with sinners**

Walking in integrity means walking away from wicked men or women. Here is wisdom as we find it in Psalm 1. David refused to sit with sinner, with people who deceive and slander and mock. The word ‘hypocrites’ points to people who say one thing and do another, people who look good but inside are corrupt (26:4). The scribes and Pharisees were thorough hypocrites according to Jesus (Mat 24). Similar to hypocrites are people who practice partiality or favouritism, a problem in many churches. David was probably being accused by hypocrites, by men pointing the finger at him while blind to their own sins. Hypocrites play havoc in any society, and especially in the church. When David saw a hypocrite he refused to sit with him. He hated the assembly or gathering of evildoers (26:5).

The wicked with whom David refused to sit or have anything to do with are further characterised in his prayer in verses 9 and 10. This psalm has more of a chiastic than a progressive structure. Its central focus is on the house of God and the assembly of God’s people, which contrasts with the assembly of the wicked. Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that they could not be in both camps (1Cor 10:21). David and Paul knew they could not sit with deceivers and hypocrites, with men who take bribes or misuse the Lord’s money - what about you? Sadly there is no lack of such people in the church!

David prays that his soul will not be gathered with sinners (26:9). He knew that while wheat and tares may grow together, at harvest or on judgment day they will be separated (Mat 13:30). We have to interact with the wicked in various ways, but let us not get caught up in their wicked ways. It was very difficult to get anything done in India without paying a bribe. A preacher friend once slept on the floor of the train because he would not pay a bribe to get a seat. It is becoming like this in our society. If you promise to promote the ‘Yes’ vote you will get free flights on Qantas! Is this not a bribe? ‘Sinister schemes’ operate even in churches (26:10). Let us walk with integrity before the Lord and before other people, and let us be discerning of people around us who walk in dark and devious ways. ‘Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good’ (Rom 12:9).

**3. I love the house of the Lord**

David’s ‘walk in my integrity’ becomes, ‘I wash my hands in innocence’ as he goes into the house of the Lord (26:6). It is these words that point to him begin falsely accused and asking the Lord to vindicate him. The idea of washing his hands came from seeing the priests washing their hands at the bronze laver before going into the holy place or before sacrificing an animal on the altar.

David would join the people in making atonement for his sins, and in praising and thanking the Lord in the tent of meeting (26:6,7). He would praise God for his wondrous works, remembering the great deliverance out of Egypt, the wilderness days and entrance into the Promised Land. As believers, we remember God’s awesome works going way back the creation, but especially his work of redemption in the cross of Jesus Christ. Such remembrance ‘serves to enrich the present and give precision to one’s praise’. It serves to inform us about the future because God does not change.

David delighted in God’s word and in being in God’s house (26:8). Like us, the focus of his life was God’s house, and on gathering with God’s people for worship: ‘In the congregations I will bless the Lord’ (26:12). He did not go to God’s house simply to protest his innocence, or to pray for victory or good health, or simply because he was king. He loved the house where the Lord dwelt, ‘the place where your glory dwells’ (26:8). In those days God chose to dwell in *‘shekinah*’ glory above the Ark of the Covenant.

These days we have seen the glory of the Lord in his only begotten Son who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). We have God’s Spirit with us whenever we gather in his holy name. Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in his name he was in their midst (Mat 18:20). In Hebrews 10:25 we are commanded not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Listening to or watching a sermon on line is instructive but where is the congregational praise or mutual encouragement? As children we come with our family to church, but the time comes when we have to make a choice for ourselves. What will you choose as you grow up and leave home?

**4. I will walk in my integrity**

Public worship is not just about remembering all the works of the Lord and praising him. It is not just about choosing to go to the house of the Lord today, as important as this is. It is about choosing to walk with the Lord all your days. It is about forsaking all others to be united with Christ and be faithful to him ‘till death do us part’- actually, not even death parts us from Christ!

The words, ‘But as for me’ in verse 11 reminds us of Joshua and his solemn commitment, ‘But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’ (Josh 24:15). It is sad that so many people in the church have adopted the ‘spirit of the times’ or, as David would say, ‘the ways of the wicked’, in making no commitments in life: no commitment to marriage, to family, to an employer or employee, or even to the Lord. Christians commit to being in church on the Lord’s Day, unless something more interesting comes along! Jesus was committed to you when he gave his life for your freedom from sin and death; so what is your commitment to him today, right here and now?

In these closing verses we see David’s loyalty, his humility, and his assurance. David said, ‘I will walk’, not ‘I might walk’, or, ‘I will walk as long as I can’ (26:11). In saying this, he was not boasting of his own strength. He asks the Lord to redeem him and be merciful to him. He admits his sin and his weakness, as he asks for forgiveness and mercy or grace to press on walking in the covenant love of the Lord. The Lord in his grace and power will make our way smooth or level, and he will help us to stand against all evil, ‘and having done all to stand’ (Eph 6:13). Is this the assurance you have as a covenant child of your Father in heaven?