

## Feeling Oppressed? – God of Justice – Psalm 64:7

### Scripture Reading: Psalm 64:1-10

#### Introduction

Oppression and persecution are well known facts of life for many Christians around the world

When we think of persecution of Christians we typically think of places like parts of the Middle East and Africa where Christians are routinely arrested, jailed, and even killed for daring to follow Christ

Or we think of China or North Korea where the church is forced underground because worshipping differently than the government says is proper is a serious crime

But persecution and oppression take many forms and we are already seeing signs of it here – albeit it's still generally in ways that are small enough to be overlooked or dismissed as paranoia

We see it in the treatment of Christian students on most college campuses, we see it in Hollywood where anything even remotely related to a biblical standard of morality is ridiculed, and we see it in the public attacks on Christian businesses

During this past year and still we see churches singled out for harsher restrictions than strip clubs with some churches and pastors having huge fines levied against them for continuing to meet

And people are being kicked off of social media and other platforms just for speaking what those in power believe to be the wrong message and one has to wonder if and when that standard might be applied to churches

Pastor Andrew Brunson had lived and ministered in Turkey for 23 years when he was arrested and imprisoned in October of 2016 in the midst of the purge that occurred after a failed coup attempt

After eventually being released in October of 2018 due to pressure from the U.S. government and upon returning to the States he commented on how much change he noticed and the persecution he believed is coming to our shores

Listen to what he had to say in an interview from a little over a year ago:

“First of all, I think it’s coming to the U.S. that there will be persecution. I was isolated for a few years, and coming back to the states was almost like coming back to a different country in many ways. And I’m astounded at the speed with which, I think, the U.S. is imploding.

“There are any number of issues where it seems that it’s no longer enough for a person of faith to get along with, or to serve, or to treat well someone they disagree with. And I think that the political business, media, celebrity class, and also academia, it seems that there’s much more of a demand that people approve of, that they validate, that they celebrate things that they actually disagree with.

“Persecution is nothing new....The thing is, that we in the West have not experienced [persecution] very much. It’s very unusual for a Westerner to be arrested for his faith. So we haven’t experienced it, but I think we are going to. I think it’s coming to this country.”

No one in their right mind would ever want to suffer persecution but persecution and oppression have been the lot of the church of Christ for its entire history

And we really shouldn’t be surprised because Jesus told his followers to expect it

In **Matthew 5:10-12** in the Sermon on the Mount he taught –

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

And in **John 15:9** he said –

*If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

For a time Christians have enjoyed a great deal of peace in these United States but it seems that we are now living in a post-Christian culture that is moving toward becoming anti-Christian and oppression and perhaps persecution is coming. And what makes this trend all the more frightening is that not all of the enemies of God are outside of the churches as more and more churches and denominations become more controlled by the culture than the Word of God.

I suspect it may not be long before we see some who claim to be Christian joining in the attacks on other Christians for their beliefs and practices.

This morning we are going to consider how introducing God's justice into the situation changes everything and how taking God's role into account should change how we face oppression and persecution.

Our main passage that we will be exploring today is Psalm 64 which we just read through.

As the superscript of the psalm indicates this psalm was penned by King David.

Most scholars date it as having been written during the time when David's son, Absalom, was preparing to commit treason against his father along with David's trusted chief of state.

In it we hear David's anguish over the plot being hatched against him as he takes his case before God until the turning point of the psalm when we read the words, "But God..." in verse 7.

We are going to first look at the nature of David's oppressors.

Then we will consider the nature of the oppression and finish up by considering the fact that God is just and how God's justice will prevail in spite of how things might seem at any given moment.

And by examining David's case we will come to have a better understanding of what to expect for ourselves.

Let's begin by looking at what King David's oppressors were like.

## **I. The Nature of the Oppressors**

First, let's consider the names David uses to describe those who sought to harm him.

In **verse 1** he calls them "the enemy" and in **verse 2** he refers to them as "the wicked" and as "evildoers".

David rightly characterizes those who were against him not as his enemies alone but also as those who are morally corrupt and therefore acting against God by disregarding his moral standard.

Their behavior shows the evil nature of their intentions as they hatched their plans and plotted in secret and **verse 5** tells us they were committed to performing their evil deeds.

In fact, **verse 6** reveals how they conducted an in-depth search for ways to carry out injustice as they plumbed the depths of depravity found in the human mind and heart.

These were no insurrectionists of opportunity – they were cold and calculating in making their plans to harm David.

Notice that words are their primary weapons as they engaged in a campaign of secret slander designed to turn the common sentiment and public opinion against David.

Verse 3 [**Psalm 64:3**] says they sharpened their tongues for maximum effect and used their words like well-aimed arrows and verse 4 [**Psalm 64:4**] says they laid in ambush as they secretly and suddenly slandered David who was blameless.

Being slandered at all is a terrible thing but it's particularly vexing to have your reputation defiled by someone who remains anonymously hidden away in a place of safety where they are confident they cannot be reached.

In wartime snipers are some of the most feared people on the battlefield because they shoot from seclusion and aren't seen or heard until they unexpectedly strike and then it's too late.

David was a man of war and I doubt he had much concern with an enemy he could meet face to face but hidden snipers can inflict a mortal wound when one least expects it leaving one virtually defenseless.

But words weren't their only weapons as we read in verse 5 [**Psalm 64:5**] that they set traps for David

What precise forms these traps or "snares" took is unknown but the purpose of any trap is to bring down prey or to entangle it so that it can be more easily overcome

David's oppressors were mean, vicious men through and through and they only cared about bring David down

Notice also that they were as boastful and arrogant as they were malicious

In verse 5 [**Ps 64:5**] they show that they believe their concealment and cunning secrecy in plotting and carrying out their plans is so complete that no one, not even God, can see what they are up to

The same characteristics are likely to be seen in any oppression and persecution against God's people today

However, it will likely be devised and carried out under the anonymity of governmental bureaucracy and the machinations of corporate policies that conceal the bad actors behind a virtually impenetrable shield

And like Absalom and his co-conspirators, those responsible will undoubtedly revel in their apparent invincibility and boast as they make their plans and carry out their plots

To this point in the psalm, things appear to be dire but then we come to verse 7 and the "But God..." and everything changes

But before we look at that let's diverge for a few moments and take a look at the nature of oppression and what it does to its targets

## **II. The Nature of Oppression**

There are two effects that oppression brings that are revealed in our psalm and the first is that oppression can actually cause us real harm

### **A. It can harm us**

In verse 2 [**Ps 64:2**] David cried out to God and said, "*Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked*"

Clearly, what David is praying for is protection from the effects of the plots that were being hatched against him

We teach children to recite "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me"

But words can and do often bring hurt and even harm to those whom they are aimed at

And King David knew that the slander that was being used against him might well have its desired effect and put him in serious jeopardy

A king, or really any person of God, has a lot riding on maintaining their reputation and well-aimed slander can cause irreparable harm and even destroy a person's effectiveness

David knew that he was vulnerable and he also knew that he was largely unable to personally do anything about it

The battle wasn't fair because his foes wouldn't face him head on so that he could defend himself

He obviously knew his enemies existed and that they were working to bring him down but he didn't know when and from what angle they would strike so he turned to God and sought his protection

And prayer really is our best protection against oppression because prayer releases God's power into the situation

No matter how dire a situation looks or how helpless we might feel, God is always available to hear our prayers and he is our refuge

We see that truth stated plainly in **Psalm 46:1** –

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

And look at **Job 5:20-21** which seems to speak directly to David's situation –

*In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes.*

Or **Psalm 138:7** which is also found in a psalm of David –

*Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me.*

And there are many, many more passages we could look at that describe God’s hedge of protection around his people David was concerned about what his adversaries might actually do to him but he was concerned about something else even more

Notice in verse 1 [**Ps 64:1**] what King David prayed for first. He prayed –

*Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy.*

Did you catch that?

David first asked God to “preserve [his] life from **dread** of the enemy”

That reveals the more serious concern David and we should have regarding oppression and persecution – the fear and dread it can cause us to feel

## **B. It can frighten us**

Dread is a state of severe distress that is awakened in us by our intense concern over some impending or even imagined evil that we anticipate

King David understood well that dread clouds the mind and prevents clear thinking

Dread often results in a kind of amplification of danger that results in us assigning power and abilities to the object of our fears that they don’t really have

Dread is based more on a figment of our own imagination than it is a realistic assessment of what we fear but dread is real and it’s quite dangerous in that it can paralyze us and keep us from mounting a proper resistance

David was right to be concerned about the schemes and attacks of his enemies and we are as well

Acknowledging the reality of the dangers we face and taking them seriously is healthy because concern causes us to take action

But fear and dread are counter-productive in that they cause us to worry and tend to freeze us in place as we fret over what we face and despair over what we can do

Think about this: dread strips power from our God and gives it to our enemies

That’s accurate isn’t it?

As we build up the evils that confront us we can’t help but make God proportionally smaller in comparison to them

But when we look directly at God and consider his might and power the opposite happens and as God gets bigger the things we are prone to dread naturally shrink

We don’t know the precise situation under which David wrote Psalm 12 but he could have written it after looking around today as it really does express our situation

Turn there if you would and let’s look at it together (page 452 in the Visitors’ Bibles)

David writes [**Ps 12:1-8**]:

*Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone; for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man. Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.*

*May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, 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 prowls, as vileness is exalted among the children of man.*

The situation David describes is dire as he says that even the faithful have disappeared and everyone speaks wrongly and he calls on the Lord to destroy those who speak thus

Notice how the Lord determines to provide protection and preservation to those who were being victimized to their great relief but, as the psalm ends, the wicked are still prowling on every side and vileness is still celebrated

God never promised his children a trouble-free life; he has only promised his presence and protection

And that is where the "But God..." comes in as we see that, in the end, God's justice will prevail

### **III. But God is Just**

Let's look again at verses 7-10 together [Ps 64:7-10]

*But God shoots his arrow at them; they are wounded suddenly. They are brought to ruin, with their own tongues turned against them; all who see them will wag their heads. Then all mankind fears; they tell what God has brought about and ponder what he has done. Let the righteous one rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him! Let all the upright in heart exult!*

What a difference the "But God..." makes as the roles are reversed and what the wicked are doing to the righteous is now done to them

David's persecutors believed they had everything going for them: secrecy, seclusion, stealth, planning, and all the arrows but now God comes to David's defense and they are the ones who are now wounded

Their attacks had come unexpectedly but we see God fire back at them suddenly and from an even more secure position

So it will always be in the end for those who attack God's people and as his justice will be measured out to them without warning and their first inkling that they are in jeopardy will be when they are wounded and brought to ruin

They attacked David with words and God righteously turned their own words against them to bring them down with the idea being that they would trip over their own tongues

I couldn't help but be reminded of Haman in the book of Esther who plotted against the righteous Mordecai and built a gallows for him only to find himself suspended on it when his evil machinations came to light

And Daniel's accusers who found themselves being a meal for the lions after conspiring against him

It's amazing how often God uses the very devices of the wicked against them in judgment

And whereas David's attackers boasted in asking "Who can see what we are up to?" the answer is now given that everyone will see their fall and reject them because their fall will serve as a warning and everyone would be a witness to what God had done

The righteous punishment of the wicked tends to have a profound effect on those who witness it – both in turning some away from evil and in giving others confidence to continue in righteousness

The prophet Isaiah writes about this phenomenon in **Isaiah 26:9** –

*My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.*

Things seem to be as dark as night when we're in the midst of oppression and under attack but when God shows up and exercises his righteous judgment everything comes to light and even those who would have cheered on the oppressors are caused to contemplate the reality of God's justice and speak of it

Then in verse 10 [Ps 64:10] we see the result will be that the righteous will rejoice

And not just in the fact that God had protected his own or even that God had vindicated himself but that everyone was aware of that fact and their faith in God will be strengthened

In this, we see David's first prayer request to be kept from falling into dread of his oppressors fulfilled because, even if the persecution continues, the child of God can know that justice is coming and be strengthened in the midst of it

## Conclusion

As I wrap up this morning I think it's important to emphasize once again that oppression and even persecution may likely still come and that God may well not stop us from being hurt by it

And while it is perfectly normal to recoil from oppression we don't need to look at it with dread because, in the final analysis, our oppressors can't harm us in any way that matters for eternity and God promises to handle it

Look with me at one more passage from Matthew's gospel – **Matthew 10:26-28** –

*So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

That passage speaks of God's control over eternity and goes on to tell of our value to God

And we always need to remember that just because it may seem that justice is slow in coming that doesn't mean it's not coming

Like the old saying goes, Justice delayed is not justice denied and we can be confident that God will settle all accounts and continue to praise God and trust in his justice secure in the knowledge that one day all will see it

Let's pray

**Psalm 64:1-10 (page 480)**

- 1Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy.
- 2Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the throng of evildoers,
- 3who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows,
- 4shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at him suddenly and without fear.
- 5They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly, thinking, "Who can see them?"
- 6They search out injustice, saying, "We have accomplished a diligent search." For the inward mind and heart of a man are deep.
- 7But God shoots his arrow at them; they are wounded suddenly.
- 8They are brought to ruin, with their own tongues turned against them; all who see them will wag their heads.
- 9Then all mankind fears; they tell what God has brought about and ponder what he has done.
- 10Let the righteous one rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him! Let all the upright in heart exult!