

Final Prayer

Great and Mighty Lord; fix my hearts on You with such intensity that no temptations of the evil one can shake me. Keep my feet firmly on Your pathway, guide me securely through my troubles, and bring me safely to my journey's end in Your eternity. Through Jesus Christ I pray; AMEN

Psalm 64

No: 5 Week: 185 Thursday 2/04/09

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the caring way in which You deal with us; for when You remind us of our failings and expose our errors, You also hold out to us the hope of salvation and the opportunity for healing. May we never be afraid to take up Your challenge to deal with our problems so that we become better people and better servants of the Kingdom and each other. We ask this through Your name, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Hope

Remember in prayer today your own private hopes and dreams, whether to do with your work, your family, your health or any other personal concern. Seek the Lord's will.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who suffer under bad government or dictatorship*
- *Pray for leaders preparing for the G20 summit in London*
- *Give thanks for wherever evil is defeated*

Meditation

Reveal Yourself to us, Lord God, again and again;
Demonstrate Your passion for all You have made.

Through creation, reveal the authority of Your Word;
Through awesome deeds, reveal Your total control.

Through forgiveness, reveal the brilliance of Your love;
Through salvation, reveal Your eternal faithfulness.

Through healing, reveal the power of Your touch;
Through deliverance, reveal Your rule over Satan;

Through prophecy, reveal Your timeless purposes;
Through justice, reveal the impartiality of Your heart.

Reveal Yourself to us, Lord God, again and again;
Show that You care for Your world, for now and forever.

Bible Study - Psalm 64

- ¹ To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. *shooting unexpectedly, without fear.*
- Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer; protect my life from fear of the enemy.* ⁵ *They encourage each other in evil intent; they talk of setting snares secretly, thinking, 'Who will see us?'*
- ² *Hide me from the conspiracies of the wicked, from the gang of evildoers,* ⁶ *They devise injustice; 'We have devised a perfect plot!'*
- ³ *who have sharpened their tongue as a sword, and aimed bitter words as arrows,* *For what is inside a man and his heart is deep.*
- ⁴ *to shoot at the innocent from cover;*

⁷ But God will shoot at them with his arrow,
and they will be wounded suddenly.
⁸ He will bring them to ruin because of their tongues;
all who see them will shake their heads.

⁹ Then all people will fear;
they will declare what God has done,
and ponder what he has done.
¹⁰ Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD
and take refuge in him.
All the upright in heart will praise Him!

Review

In the coming days leading up to Easter, we will use some Psalms as a means of reflecting on Jesus' death and resurrection. You may ask, 'why the Psalms?' The answer is that the Psalms are Scripture's poems and reflections on the whole of life, addressed to God in worship. Amongst them are psalms that reflect Jesus' life and ministry, and psalms that closely reflect His passion and death. In addition, whilst many psalms reflect a general spirit of praise, some of these suggest the glory of the resurrection in which God is praised because of His power over evil and the grave, and the triumph of life everlasting.

Psalm 64 and victory over evil The psalm I have chosen for today is Psalm 64, which is a general prayer for protection from enemies. It begins with a request to the Lord to give protect against wicked enemies (64:1-6) who engage in all kinds of devious evil. The second half of the psalm declares complete confidence in God's response to such evil (64:7-10). The Lord God will suddenly defeat all this evil, leaving everyone in awe and wonder at what He has done, and the 'upright' who recognise this will praise God! It may seem a long way from this general hope to the ultimate victory of God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the hope of such a victory had been a part of Israel's life for centuries. God's people certainly believed that their Messiah would bring them a final and complete victory over the evils that oppressed them, and this psalm is typical of many that express such a faith.

Jesus, and His ministry Jesus, of course, was raised just like every other Jewish boy and would have learned many Psalms during his childhood. We have no idea whether he remembered Psalm 64 in particular, but it is similar to many other psalms with the same theme, and He would have known these themes very well. As His own ministry developed over those few years before He died, Jesus gradually became aware of the voices of opposition that gathered around Him, secretly speaking against Him and even plotting His downfall (Matt 12:14). Most of Jesus' ministry took place around Galilee and surrounding areas (according to Matthew, Mark and Luke), however, the reports of what Jesus said and did reached the ears of the religious authorities in Jerusalem, and senior religious figures were sent to try and catch him out (Matt 15:1f.). At that time, they had no fear of Jesus, they felt themselves in control of Israel and Judea and wanted to keep it that way (see 64:5,6).

Opposition to Jesus' ministry Eventually, when Jesus came to Jerusalem, the authorities found themselves threatened by His presence. No one can read what happened when Jesus entered Jerusalem in the days before His death and resurrection, and not realise that He became increasingly concerned at this opposition, and at what it meant. In Matthew Gospel, for example, He faced a concerted conspiracy of religious authorities who attempted to catch Him out with trick questions (Matt 21:23-22:45). The words of Psalm 64 reflect this part of Jesus' life very well; all His opponents gathered against Him in 'gangs', created 'conspiracies', and spoke with tongues 'sharpened as a sword' (64:2,3). Indeed, Jesus knew they plotted His death and had predicted this previously to His disciples (Matt 16:21f. 20:17-19).

The Psalms point to God's victory Jesus knew what lay ahead, and He knew the psalms. It was of course hard for Him to face the fact that people were plotting to kill Him, but Psalm 64 along with many other psalms told Him with confidence that God would not allow evil to have the last word. Our passage tells us that despite all cunning and treachery, God would return on those who were evil the fruit of their own plans; they 'aimed bitter words as arrows' (64:3), but in the end 'God will shoot at them with His arrow' (64:7). In addition, the perfect plot (64:6) would be brought 'to ruin' (64:8).

The prophetic voice of the Psalms How can any of us really know what it was like for Jesus to face going to Jerusalem in the days before His death? But Jesus knew that the unanimous voice of the Psalms, and indeed all the prophetic voices of the Old Testament that spoke of His coming, and spoke about God's ultimate victory against evil and the vindication of the 'righteous' (64:10). God was about to do a great and mighty work through Jesus, and as with all history, those on earth before it happened could not see it with the same eyes that we now see it after the event. However, they had the testimony of Scripture that spoke to them of an unimaginable victory that would enable the 'righteous' to 'take refuge in Him' (64:10). Psalms such as Psalm 64 only touch the surface of the meaning of this victory, or of what Jesus endured for us on the Cross in order to achieve it. They stand as a permanent testimony of the power of God to defeat evil, and as such, they represent the prophetic voice of God's Word that is never silent.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways is evil hidden from our eyes today, and what does it take to expose it? How can God help us?
2. Discuss in your group the connections you see between the ministry of Jesus and this Psalm 64.
3. What do we say to Jesus when we 'praise Him'? What does Psalm 64 say that we should praise God for?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have read the Psalms many times and have been amazed at their prophetic nature. It seems to leap out at me whenever I read these ancient songs and hymns. However, I have met others who say that the Psalms do not inspire them, and they consequently leave them out of services (if they are preachers or worship leaders). I find this incomprehensible. It is true that the people who wrote these psalms had other things in mind when they wrote them, all of them quite different from our circumstance today. However, the Holy Spirit led them to be written without too many 'specific' references, and this means we can use the Psalms in many different ways today. The Psalms invite us to reinterpret them according to the circumstances of life we face.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Think back over situations in which you have encountered evil and wrongdoing, and consider whether this has been overcome, or whether it persists in some way. How can you be confident that God will achieve victory?*
- *Pray as Jesus taught, for your enemies. In particular, pray for those enemies of your who are opposed to your faith and beliefs, Pray also for those who are trapped in evil ways because they see no other way to live.*