

The Steadfast Love of God Endures

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[0 : 00] Well, turn with me now to that psalm we've just sung, Psalm 52, Psalm 52. And I want to read the whole psalm, the wee bit of reading this evening, but I won't keep you too long.

Psalm 52, and we'll sweep the whole of this short psalm. Psalm 53, and we'll sweep the whole psalm.

Psalm 53, and we'll sweep the whole psalm.

I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. I will thank you forever because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good in the presence of the godly.

Well, over recent weeks, I've been looking through the book of 1 Samuel, and I've been reflecting on the life of David in different parts, just in different areas of his life.

[1 : 54] And this psalm that I've just read was written by David in the wake of what was a truly horrific, horrific episode, incident, that demonstrates just how low King Saul had sunk in his life and in his relationship with God.

And as I read that psalm, I see a clear illustration there of two very different types of people, or two very different kinds of heart.

I see a heart that is utterly selfish and self-absorbed. And I see a heart that is good. If I can put it another way, I see a heart that is inward-looking.

Everything is about me. And I see a heart that is upward-looking. And by that I mean a heart that is entirely devoted to God, to serving God.

But the psalm does far more than illustrate the difference between two types of people. The psalm also gives us a very clear picture of the God, the living and the true God, who watches and who acts and who holds his people to account.

[3 : 22] That's what I want to look at this evening. Not just the two men. We'll look at the two different types of men. But I also want to consider the God who holds us all to account on all that he does.

Now, we have a little introduction there at the start of the psalm. But if that's all we had, then I think we would be somewhat confused.

Especially by the time we go to the end of verse 7. Who is the psalm about? What's going on here? And that's why we're thankful for the book we have in front of us.

And that's why we're thankful that we can go back and look and find out the context of the story by reading 1 Samuel chapter 22. And had we had time, we could have read chapter 21 as well.

And that would have set the scene for us. But just before I do move in to look at the psalm, let's just think about what was going on. What was happening? What is the context to this psalm?

[4 : 22] Well, we know a little of the history. As the days of the judges were coming to an end, Israel turned and said to Samuel, We, we want to be just like all the nations about us.

They've got kings. We want a king as well. And despite the fact that that wasn't the best path to take, God gave them over to the desire of their hearts.

And so often that is the way, isn't it? God gives us the desire of our hearts even though that might not be the best thing for us. And there's always a lesson to be learned in those circumstances.

So they get a king. And Saul is that man. But remember what Saul was like to begin with. Do you remember when, after Saul had been anointed and the day came for Saul to be proclaimed as king. All of the people were gathered together, this enormous mass of people. And there was no sign of Saul. Samuel has arrived and this Saul who literally, we remember, stood head and shoulders over everybody else.

[5 : 33] He was a magnificent, tall man. No sign of him. Where is he? He's hidden in the baggage we read in 1 Samuel 10. He's hiding.

He's cowering. What an enormous responsibility is on my shoulders and I'd rather not have it. He's humble. And he's God-fearing. But it didn't take long for Saul to become proud. And it didn't take long for Saul to become unpredictable. It didn't take long for Saul. I think if we saw somebody like this today, we would say, that man is pretty unstable. He was impulsive. Do you remember how impatient he was when it came to make that sacrifice? And he wouldn't wait for Samuel. And he offered a sacrifice to God that was unlawful. And that was the beginning of the end. For that very reason, for this reason alone, the scepter will be removed. Remember the rash vow he made.

[6 : 39] If anyone eats between such and such a time and this time, they will be put to death. And who was it that ate? His beloved son Jonathan took a taste of honey and so was condemned to death.

And had it not been for the people rising up and saying, no, this cannot be so, Jonathan would have been killed. Saul was rash.

He was impulsive. And he was envious. And we see that outworked more than anywhere else in the relationship he had with David. As David rose to prominence, so Saul's envy increased.

And here we are this evening with David fleeing for his life. That brings us to the circumstances that led to the psalm being written. So fleeing for his life, we reached 1 Samuel 22. David is in hiding. He goes to the priest Ahimelech and he asks for provisions. The priest says to him, what are you doing here?

[7 : 41] The priest is frightened to see David in front of him. And David tells him the story. Yes, I'm on a special mission for the king. Where are your men? Never mind where they are.

They are somewhere else. But we need provisions. And I've left in such a hurry that I don't have a weapon. Do you have a weapon for me? Well, we only have the sword of Goliath. Well, that'll do nicely.

So he takes the showbread, the bread that is reserved for worship. And he takes the sword and he gets on his way. But that encounter with the priest is witnessed by this man that we've read of. Doig the Edomite, Saul's chief herdsman. He was a man of prominence. He was a man with a bitter status. He was a man that was doing okay for himself, quite frankly.

And he reports back to King Saul. And then we read that dreadful, dreadful thing episode.

Ahimelech, the priest, the priest of Jehovah.

[8 : 40] A man appointed by God, along with his family, to act in mediation between God and the people.

Summoned before Saul, questioned and then condemned to death. But not only is Ahimelech to be killed.

All of the priests are. All 52 of the men wearing linen ephods, the priest's garment. And their families. And their village.

And Doig the Edomite. Steps forward. I will do it. I will do it. Well, do these chapters that I've just summarised, not just outline for us a truly, truly horrific and wicked set of circumstances that well and truly mark the end of Saul's reign as king.

Well and truly mark that slide for Saul away from the presence of God. Well, it's about those incidents then that David wrote this psalm.

[9 : 51] And let's turn now and look at it. We're going to look first of all at verses 1 to 4. And we're going to consider who I am calling the inward looking man.

The selfish man. Now the first thing we need to do, just so we're clear. Who is this person? Because like I said, if we didn't have 1 Samuel, we would say, well who's David writing about here? You could be forgiven for thinking, based on the introduction I just gave you, that he's speaking here about Saul. I don't think he is. I don't think so.

And there's a few reasons for believing it's not Saul that this psalm is about. Regardless of Saul's wickedness, David honoured God.

And God appointed Saul. God anointed Saul. David would not touch the Lord's anointed. Now remember, on two occasions, David was able, he had opportunity to take Saul's life.

[10 : 51] And we could almost argue, so he should have. So he should have. What a dreadful thing for me to save from. At the high place that I stand in. But that's the flesh talking.

So he should have. But he didn't. He could have killed him in the cave when he cut the hem off his garment. But he didn't. He could have killed him as he crept up to him as he slept in the camp.

But he didn't. He would not touch the Lord's anointed. He revered God's reign and God's rule. And remember when Jonathan and Saul died.

He lamented and mourned their death. This psalm is not about Saul. Saul did give the instruction. Saul was guilty. But the psalm is not about Saul.

The psalm is about Doeg, the Edomite, the chief herdsman. And the extent of his wickedness is unfurled through these verses for us. Look at verse 1 there.

[11:49] Why do you boast of evil? He boasts of evil. What is he doing? Well, David has heard word. This man Doeg is going out among the people and saying, yes, it was me.

It was me. Yes, it was. I was the only one bold enough, brave enough to follow through Saul's command and kill the priests.

It was me. I am the man. I am second in command. Nobody else would have dared do it.

Well, why did he do such a thing? Why did he do it? What motivated Doeg, the Edomite, to do such a wicked thing?

My own conclusion is, from reading 1 Samuel, is that it was greed. Do you remember when Saul gathered together the Benjaminites, his tribe, the smallest of the 12 tribes, and he tried to manipulate them.

[12:57] He said, will David give you vineyards? Will he make you a commander over the thousands? Will he give you the status? Can you rely on David to give you these positions if he is king?

The inference, of course, is, you stay with me and you'll be okay. But there was silence from the people. They weren't going to do this.

They knew that they would be going against the will of the command and the rule of God if they were to turn their swords onto the priests. They wouldn't do it. But Doeg, the Edomite, steps forward and he tells Saul what he has seen.

And I wonder, did you notice, we'll come to it in a moment, he told a little lie as he shared with Saul what he had seen. But that was a significant lie. Doeg boasts.

You know, I think when David says, why do you boast of evil? Oh, mighty man. Do you get an edge of sarcasm of that statement? I do. I do.

[14:00] You think you're so good? You think you're so good? Doeg boasts. He thinks he is something. When in actual fact, he is nothing. And isn't that so often the case with a proud man?

Is that not the case with us? A man who boasts in his own achievements. What I have done. What I am capable of doing.

Well, he is nothing other than a proud man. And again and again and again, as we go through the scriptures, what do we hear? God's rebuke against the proud man.

God constantly condemning the proud man for his short-sighted foolishness. David continues. Why do you boast of evil, oh mighty man?

The steadfast love of God endures all the day. You think. You think. You think. You boast in your evil act. You think that in some way you have prevailed against the living and the true God.

[15:07] You think that in some way by your actions you have diminished his power. That you have demeaned God in some way. God's steadfast love cannot be thwarted.

It endures. It cannot be diminished. It cannot be undermined. The steadfast love of God endures all the day. Think about that just for a moment.

Think about the steadfast love of God over the entire span from Eden. Write down into your own experience today.

The steadfast love of God endures. As Eve took the fruit and gave in and set a chain of events in motion that led to Calvary.

The steadfast love of God endured and watched all the day. And as Israel rebelled again and again and again throughout the Old Testament period.

[16:13] The steadfast love of God watched and endured all the day. And in the 400 years of silence between the Old and the New Testament.

Not another prophetic word was uttered. God fell silent. But his steadfast love watched and endured every single day.

And the steadfast love of God ordained the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner. And then the steadfast love of God was poured out in the birth of Jesus.

The steadfast love of God watched through Christ's suffering. The steadfast love of God watched as that suffering reached its absolute apex, the zenith.

When Christ was at its most persecuted and most bruised and beaten and humiliated. The steadfast love of God watched all the day.

[17 : 23] And then at the cross, the steadfast love of God was emptied out from heaven onto sinners like me and like you.

God's steadfast love poured out onto us. And it is God's steadfast love that will prevail and preserve me and you if you walk with Jesus right through your life.

We found life in Christ. We live for Christ. And then when the day comes, we will live for all of eternity with Christ.

Because of the steadfast love of God that endures all the day. Well that is the steadfast love that Doig the Edomite despised. And he sought to trample all over it with his foolish boasting.

What a fool he was. But he wasn't just guilty of boasting, was he? Doig was guilty of far more than that. He was guilty of using the most potent weapon that has ever been formed.

[18 : 34] A weapon that you have access to and a weapon that I have access to. And a weapon that you use and a weapon that I use to our shame far too often. And of course I mean the tongue.

Don't die. And with this tongue then, Doig the Edomite went on to commit three extra evils. His first evil was the pride. But then he went on to commit three more.

First verse 2. He went on to plot evil. He used his tongue like a razor. Now just think about that. How sharp and destructive this razor can be at times.

His tongue was just like a razor plotting evil. He used his tongue in verse 3 to lie. Now I said a moment ago, I'll refer again to the little lie that Doig the Edomite told.

Did you notice what it was? It seems like such an insignificant small detail in 1 Samuel 22 and verse 10. When Doig came to Saul, he said, I saw David coming to Ahimelech.

[19 : 40] And I saw Ahimelech give him the bread, the provisions. And I saw him give him Goliath's sword. Oh, and I saw Ahimelech inquiring of the Lord for him.

I never read that in the account. And I don't think it happened. It was a lie. And do you see the consequences of that lie?

You see, I think that tiny little lie led at least in part to the massacre of the priests. That's what really made Saul angry. What does that tell us this evening?

Does it not tell us that our lies can have enormous implications? How uncomfortable is that for us? Our lies can have enormous implications.

And we're all guilty of falsehood. Even though we're commanded not to, we do it. And the consequences can be devastating.

[20 : 41] And that's why God hates it so much. He hates it so much. Doig went on to do something else. Verse 4. He loved words that devour.

Just destructive. He used his tongue to be deceitful. What a dreadful example of a man this is. But do you see a spiritual dimension to this?

Do you see anybody else represented in this picture of this man? Surely it's Satan. Everything that Doig has been doing is the way Satan goes about his business all of the time.

He is destructive. He sows falsehood. He's a liar. He's a killer. He's a robber. All of these things. And when we think about verses like this that speak about our conduct as followers of Jesus, we will automatically, I think, gravitate towards James chapter 3.

And it's a wonderful chapter in the scriptures. It's a chapter that warns us about our tongues. And we should take it deeply into our hearts. And we should let that word dwell richly in us.

[21 : 47] We should hide it in our hearts so that we can learn from it. We can apply it into our lives. But I think of another passage when I read especially this particular psalm.

I think of Proverbs chapter 6. And I think of verses 16 to 19. And it's worth looking up if you don't know the passage. Proverbs 6, 16 to 19 has a list in it of seven things that God has explicitly said that he hates.

Now he doesn't say, I dislike it. He doesn't say, I recommend you don't follow this course. He says, these six things the Lord hates, yes, and seven are an abomination to him.

God hates pride. God hates liars. God hates killers. God hates wicked scheming. God hates those who love evil. God hates false witnesses.

God hates gossips who cause strife. Those who sow discord among the brethren. That's the way the AV version would render that. Or the new King James.

[22 : 59] God hates those who sow discord among the brethren. Everything that Doeg the Edomite was, God utterly hated.

And there's a clear warning for all of us. There's a warning for us. There's a warning. You know, we might not be guilty of the literal murder of the priests.

You might not be guilty of the murder of the preacher. But I fear we can do a lot of damage with our words. And we need to be very cautious.

But that's the bad bit. Well, almost finished. Because now we come to the second, verses 5 to 7.

And we think about the God who watches.

Now, David outlines here God's response to Doeg the Edomite. And so the psalm tells us.

[23 : 58] It speaks to us of a God who observes. It speaks to us of a God who delivers a verdict. Not just on the actions of the wicked man, but also on the actions of the good man.

So one of the judgments, the judgment on Doeg the Edomite, is dreadful. The other judgment is desirable. We think, look at the last two verses there.

We'll do it in a minute. It's a desirable judgment. Both judgments are deserved. Did you get that? One is dreadful. One is desirable.

Both are deserved. And both are born out of the steadfast love of God. Now, for me, these verses speak of a God, the sovereign God, who is perfect in knowledge.

I'm speaking of verses 5 to 7. He's perfect in knowledge. Verse 5. He's perfect in justice. He is a God who determines the final destination of every man.

[24 : 58] Verse 6. And a God of refuge in verse 7. But I want you to notice just how complete and how extensive God's judgment, the dreadful judgment is in verse 5.

God will break you down forever. Is that not a terrifying prospect? He's going to break you down forever. You see, if we're here this evening and you're here under duress.

You're here perhaps because it's the right thing to do. You're here because you want to keep your spouse happy. You're here because it's what you do on a Sunday evening. It's just what you've always done. And you don't particularly care for what you hear from the preacher.

You don't particularly care for what you read in the Bible. You're a bit cynical about it. But here's the truth. Here's the truth. You might think that you're invincible. And you might think that you are beyond the reach of the judge.

But every single one of us here this evening will take the same walk one day. We're all going to take the same walk. And the walk that we take is going to be into eternity.

[26 : 10] And the eternity that we end up in is going to be determined, at least in part, by our own choices. Now I need to be careful here because there might be a run of theologians underneath me and they're going to question my theology when I suggest that we might be able to determine the outcome of our own eternal destination.

But we can, up to a point. We can turn towards God or we can turn away from God. And we have to be very careful about the choices we make.

The promise for Doeg the Edomite is that his pride and his disdain towards God will be crushed. Verse 5 again.

Look at the way David writes the psalm. He will snatch and tear you from your tent. You know, if we were to seek a modern equivalent for that, how would you put this?

How would you, if you were trying to explain to someone how incredibly quickly and devastating something appeared to be? I wonder how you'd put it. I was thinking about it.

[27 : 14] And I was thinking maybe I would say, if we were to try and take these verses and paraphrase them. Well, God will snatch you suddenly.

You won't expect it. He will take everything meaningful away from you in an instant. And you'll be utterly gone. Every trace of your memory, it'll be gone.

There'll be nothing left. That's how quick and how complete it will be. It's like the Achan in Joshua 7. I remember when Achan hid the gold and the silver and the clothing. He buried it in the ground.

He hid it. It came to light. And everything was destroyed. Everything. The family was just wiped off. All history. Completely gone. That was God's judgment.

Before you know where you are, God's righteous judgment is upon you. And you're uprooted from the land of the living. What a thought that is. Uprooted from the land of the living.

[28 : 12] Just like that. Gone. No wonder David at this point inserts that really small but really important word, Selah. You see that tiny wee word, and you've heard this before, I'm sure you have, Selah warns us, Stop.

Stop. And reflect. On just what you've heard. Don't just run past it. Stop. And pause. And think about it.

God will break you down forever. He will snatch you. And tear you from your tent. He will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah. Selah.

Why does God act this way? Surely this is unjust. Actually it's the opposite. It's justice. And in my mind it's rooted in his steadfast love.

What a bizarre thing to say. God acts in this way because his love is so rich. And his love is so perfect. And his love is so pure.

[29 : 17] And he cannot look upon evil. What is the response of the righteous? Who are the righteous? Are we the righteous? Or are we the self-righteous?

What are we? Who are the righteous? Who are the righteous that David speaks of here in verse 6? The righteous shall see and fear. And they shall laugh at him saying, See the man who would not make God his refuge?

The righteous are those who live for God and who fear God. I'm righteous. I am righteous. I am righteous.

But I'm not righteous for anything I've done. I'm righteous because of the beautifully finished work of Jesus. By the grace of God, his righteousness is my righteousness given to me by grace.

So when God looks at me and any one of you here who walks with the Lord, he sees someone who is righteous. He doesn't see you or me. He sees Jesus in us.

[30 : 24] So the righteous then look and they see a man who reaps what he has sown. It's true of us too when we see similar things.

Perhaps not to this extent. We say, well, you know, we recognize the folly of this man. He trusted in his own strength. He didn't even think about God.

He did everything by his own strength. He was like the man who built the barns. Tonight, this, you fool, this very night your souls will be required of you. It's also solemn, isn't it?

And it's difficult to reflect on passages like this. But I'll tell you what makes it a little bit easier is what comes next. And we've only got a few minutes to go. Verses 8 and 9, we're going to look at the upward looking man.

And this is why I wanted to look at this psalm. The first bit's difficult. And we don't want to hear that. We need to hear it. And it's good for us to hear it.

[31 : 23] But verses 8 and 9 are wonderful. Are just wonderful. Isn't the imagery just vivid and beautiful? You see, in contrast to Doig being torn up by the roots, that tree, Doig, will never grow again.

It's gone. It's completely gone. But there's another tree here. David is the tree. And he's like a green olive tree in the house of God.

His roots are down deep in God's house. Now, let's not be confused. There were never any olive trees in the house of God.

The temple wasn't even built at this point, I would suggest. There was no temple. So what is David saying here? I think David is saying that his life, in contrast to Doig's, his life is characterized by fruitfulness in God's presence.

He is living in God's presence. Are you living in God's presence? Are you living in God's presence? Let's answer that question in our hearts.

[32 : 36] Are you living in God's presence? Are you drawing nourishment from the eternal God, from God's presence?

Are your roots down deep in God's presence? I see olive trees quite often in traveling. And olive trees, I would argue, are probably the most important of all the trees across the Middle East. Wonderful trees. They're quite ugly trees, some of them. But, you know, a good olive tree can produce thousands of liters of oil. And they can live such a long time.

So over their lifespan, they can produce gallons and hundreds of thousands of liters of oil. But, you know, I see more than, it's not as simple as just, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.

It's far more than that. Because I see far more than that. See, a fruitful life, this is a picture of a fruitful life. A fruitful life isn't always an easy life, is it?

[33 : 37] A fruitful life isn't always easy. You see, if you want to maximize the yield, the harvest of an olive tree, then you have to graft into the stalk, you have to graft into the trunk of the tree.

If you really want a fruitful tree, well, we've done, that's been done with us in Christ. You then take the fruit, the olives, and what do you do?

If you really want the good oil, you have to bruise these olives. You have to crush these olives. It's not easy, and it's not painless.

That's the way it is. It was the way for Jesus. It was the way for him, and it's the way for his people. We're crushed, and we're pressed, those of us who walk with God, but we bear fruit.

We walk faithfully. We endure hardships, and Jesus said to us, through many tribulations, we enter the kingdom. But, you know, there was just four bullet points that characterize David, and I think they characterize those of us who want to flourish in God's presence.

[34 : 57] First of all, verse 8. Those of us who flourish in God's presence, trust him. I trust, verse 8, in the steadfast love of God, forever and ever.

What a marked difference between David, who looks to God, and Doik, who looks to himself. The second thing, a life that is flourishing, a life that is flourishing in God's presence, is a life that is thankful to God.

I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I see that you are in control, even when the tears come. A life that is flourishing, is a life that is patient, verse 9.

I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good, even when I don't understand.

I will still flourish. And then the fourth characteristic, is a life of fellowship. Those who are nourished by the root, and those who are truly the green olive trees, are those who are in fellowship, in the presence of the godly.

[36 : 15] They are waiting for your name, for your good name, in the presence of the godly, with my brothers and sisters in Christ. Well, the life of the upward looking man, is so different, to the life of the inward looking man, isn't it?

Which do you desire? Which do you desire? Which, which are you living? You see, Doik has gone. He's just now, an example, in our Bibles.

His soul lives on, he is in his eternity, whatever that is. He's gone, and Saul has gone, and David has gone, but you're still here, and so am I.

So what has the psalm said to you? What has the psalm said to you? Do you see yourself in the first man? Oh, you're not as bad as Doik, because we're never as bad as, there's always someone worse than us, isn't there?

But in truth, we are just as bad as Doik. We haven't got the same level of blood on our hands, but we are just as bad, if we're honest with ourselves.

[37 : 33] Or do you see yourself like this tree, green olive tree in the house of God, trusting in him, and thanking him, and patiently waiting for him, and enjoying fellowship?

Is that the life you see? Is that the life you want? It's yours. It's yours. It's yours if you'll take it. If you don't know Christ, he's here in our midst, his spirit is here, and he presents himself.

Come. Come. Come and be like David, and come and send your roots down deep, and flourish in my presence. Choose this day whom you will serve.

Look at the way the psalm is headed. The steadfast love of God endures. It's wonderful. It watches. It holds us to account.

His steadfast love is fair. It rebukes. And lastly, it rewards. So may the Lord give us something there this evening to reflect on, and to grow in for his glory.

[38 : 44] Let's just bow together in a word of prayer. Our Father in heaven, how your word challenges us, and how desperately, those of us who desire Christ, and who are walking with the Lord Jesus, we just desperately want to be like that green olive tree, in your presence, bearing fruit all of the day, even when the olives are being milled, even when the oil is being pressed, even when the days are dark, and we're confused, and we don't know which way to go.

Father, our desire is to walk with you, and to be fruitful for you. So to that end, Lord, will you help us, and will you strengthen us. And Lord, for those, and there are so many like them, Doeg the Edomite, these men who are intent on evil for gain, O God, we think of them across the world today, we think of them in Iraq and Syria, we think of them in so many nations where darkness prevails, and yet your light is there too.

O God, have mercy on those who are boasting in their evil. Show them your steadfast love. And Lord, if that's true of any of us here tonight, will you show us your steadfast love, show us Jesus, and change our hearts, and give us mouths that will take the name of Jesus to our lips, for your glory, and in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, we close by singing to God's praise from Psalm 92 in the Scottish Psalter, page 352, 353 rather, from verse 12, down to the end of the Psalm.

All of the singings you'll have noticed now have been relevant to the passage, and this one is particularly so. But like the palm tree flourishing shall be the righteous one, he shall like to the cedar grow that is in Lebanon.

[40 : 48] And verse down to the end of the Psalm, to show that upright is the Lord, he is a rock to me, and he from all unrighteousness is altogether free. Let's sing these four stanzas to God's praise.

Amen. ■'Cillious quiques is the Lord, ■■-communication, who live and fight in the hands of God, are pitiful, Glover and ■ces are ángel judge 1945

They shall ■ unebrate, as well learned not just how they be punished.

To show that how bright is the Lord He is our God to thee.

And we are all the time and we are here. It's all to ever be.

[43 : 20] Let's pray. Now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father. The Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and remain with us all now and always. Amen.