

Who Said Christianity Is Easy?

Psalm 17

[Though this Psalm is a little on the long side, I will include it in its entirety here, for all of it is important for the devotion to follow.]

Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry!

Give ear to my prayer **from lips free of deceit!**

From your presence let my vindication come!

Let your eyes behold the right!

You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night,

you have tested me, and you will find nothing;

I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.

With regard to the works of man,

by the word of your lips

I have avoided the ways of the violent.

My steps have held fast to your paths;

my feet have not slipped.

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;

incline your ear to me; hear my words.

Wondrously show your steadfast love,

O Savior of those who seek refuge

from their adversaries at your right hand.

Keep me as the apple of your eye;

hide me in the shadow of your wings,

from the wicked who do me violence,

my deadly enemies who surround me.

They close their hearts to pity;

with their mouths they speak arrogantly.

They have now surrounded our steps;
they set their eyes to cast us to the ground.
He is like a lion eager to tear,
as a young lion lurking in ambush.

Arise, O Lord! Confront him, subdue him!
Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword,
from men by your hand, O Lord,
from men of the world whose portion is in this life.
You fill their womb with treasure;
they are satisfied with children,
and they leave their abundance to their infants.

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;
when I awake, I shall be satisfied
with your likeness.

This is another psalm that Jesus can pray but that I cannot - unless I am in Him and covered with His forgiveness. For ***my lips are not free of deceit. My steps have not held fast to [God's] paths.*** When tested I am found wanting in God's sight. You too? Yeah. Even when we try really hard, one little thing can set us off and ruin a good day.

But Jesus . . . this is all true for Him. He is perfect. Sinless. Yet what was His reward? ***Wicked do Him violence. Deadly enemies surround Him set to cast Him to the ground,*** and which are ***like lions eager to tear and lurking in ambush.*** Maybe you find yourself in a similar place. And maybe on both sides! Receiving but also giving. Bullies aren't just for kids, and how often are we eager to tear each other apart not with our teeth but with our words? Social media is the new lion in town, it so often seems, eager to devour.

So what does Jesus do? He prays. As God, He could strike His enemies and be justified in doing so. But the Son of God did not come to take vengeance, but to save us. To save even His enemies! And so He does not strike. He prays. To His Father. And entrusts Himself into His hands. That's hard, isn't it?

His words are striking: ***Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.*** Jesus said He Himself was like a mother hen, trying to gather and protect her brood under her wings (Luke 13:34). Yet here, He is the one in need of protection!

Was his prayer heard? It doesn't seem like it, does it? Nails, spear, and cross all point to God not protecting His Son. And in one sense, that's right. Jesus was our Daniel (Daniel 6), thrown to the lions for us (Psalm 22:12-13). Come to take our sin, punishment, and death for us. To be devoured for us so that we not have to feel the teeth of the condemnation we deserve. He *wanted* to do that for you!

But on the other hand, His prayer was heard. For as the Psalm ends: ***As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.*** When I awake! Jesus will rise from the dead. The lions' teeth will not be His end. The stone will be rolled away from the lion's den and He will emerge alive. And so His prayer was heard and answered, just not in the way we first think.

It's that way for us as well. All the way around. Our Father hears and answers your prayers. You are the apple of His eye. He does cover you with His wings. It's all true. If it doesn't seem like it, if a cross and suffering is all you know now, if your enemies seem to have the upper hand, if death is near - remember Jesus. It was that way for Him, too. And yet in the end, it was His enemies who were laid waste and routed and Jesus was victorious. And so it will be for all in Jesus as well.

It's still hard! To pray. To trust. To wait. Whoever said Christianity is easy? But in the end, we too will awaken and behold the face of God. Not because of our own righteousness, but because of Jesus.

Lord Jesus, thank You for coming and laying down Your life for me in my place. Help me to trust and pray and wait, even when it is hard. Especially when it is hard! Give me faith to believe that my prayers are heard, that in You I am righteous, and that I will see Your face when You awaken me to everlasting life. And give me the love with which You loved me, that I may love all people - even my enemies! - as You did, and pray for them and serve them, too. Amen.