

Who Will Stand for Us?

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[0 : 00] Well, please do have a seat and isn't it great just to sing God's praises together as his people? And as we turn to Psalm 94 now, which is maybe where you want to turn, we'll be looking at it there, we'll see just how fitting that last song that we've been singing is as we think about who our God is together.

So why don't we just spend a moment just in prayer as we come to God's word this morning. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much that we learned last week that you are the God who is robed in majesty.

You are the God who is high and exalted and you're the God who is eternal. And so, Father, with that in mind, we do not look to ourselves. We don't look to our world, but we look to you this morning, the Holy One, for words of life and truth.

So I ask that your spirit would come and he would speak, that he would lead us into truth, that he would help us grasp a bigger picture, a bigger understanding of who you are, and that might impact our everyday lives as we live for you.

Father, thank you that you are good and your love endures forever. And this is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Psalm 94, it's a wonderful psalm. It's a strong psalm.

[1 : 15] And it's a psalm that's reminded me this week, actually, about a story that I heard about a little Quaker congregation down in Birmingham. And this little congregation, this little gathering of people didn't have an awful lot going for them.

They were an aging membership. They were dwindling in their numbers. But they did have this going for them, that the piece of land that they owned was fast turning into very prime property. Because next door to them was John Lewis, the ever-expanding, at the time, UK retailer who were in desperate need of more space.

So they looked upon this little Quaker congregation and they thought, this is the space that we need. So they tried to assert a little bit of pressure and they wrote to this little congregation, and this is what the letter read.

Dear Sirs, always good to start polite, isn't it? Dear Sirs, as part of our ongoing expansion, we would be grateful if you could allow us to purchase your land. It seems only right because we were here before you.

[2 : 19] Please let us know what you decide. You're sincerely John Lewis. Now imagine you're a member of this little Quaker gathering. And you're sitting together, you're reading out this letter together, and you look at one another.

What are you thinking? You're outnumbered. You're unimpressive. You're unspectacular. What's the question that is in your mind as you look at one another?

Surely the question is, who's going to stand for us? Who will stand for us? It's the question that God's people are asking in Psalm 94.

Come with me to verse 16. Here's the key question that's going on in this psalm, and feel the emotion and feel the pain with which this question is asked.

Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evil doers? This is what the psalmist wants.

[3 : 23] We see it in the opening verses here. He wants God to stand. He wants God to rise like the judge in a courtroom. And he wants justice. He wants God to bring judgment on the wicked.

These people who are persecuting God's people. What are they doing? We'll look at the verbs used here from verse 5. They crush.

They oppress. They slay. They murder. And notice the little detail. Who in particular are they doing this to? You see it? The widow.

The foreigner. And the fatherless. Or the orphan. So these people, the most vulnerable in this society. Who God in his mercy had particularly looked upon.

Had set his heart upon. And had made provision for them in the law of his people. That these people were going to be provided for. Protected and loved. And what's going on here. Is that they are being taken advantage of by the wicked.

[4 : 26] What are the wicked saying? Verse 7. Look at it there. God doesn't see. God takes no notice. What do they say to God's people?

What use is it calling out to your God? What good is it hoping in your God? I must have hurt. I'd imagine if you. Did you hear that?

And so the psalmist sees all this going on. And he understandably exclaims that question. Who will stand for us? Who will stand? Now it's a very real and raw question.

For many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. Who will stand for us? Here's some stats I pulled off of Operation World this week. Today if you make a decision to follow Jesus in Afghanistan.

That may well get you admitted to a psychiatric hospital. It may get you beaten up by neighbours and friends. And it may get you the very real possibility that you will lose your livelihood. Your home and your business.

[5 : 24] Because people will just not stand for it. That's going on in our world. 33 Christian women. I wonder if you saw it in the news recently. 33 Christian women in Eritrea imprisoned.

Simply because they were found to be praying to their God. Who will stand for us? Maybe that's the question that's true for you this morning.

Maybe in a smaller, in a less life threatening, but no less real way. Who will stand for us? Family and friends think you're weird because you make life decisions because you follow Jesus.

People at work, you find yourselves in very tricky situations because you will not shift from the Bible's moral teaching. You will just won't move from it. Different situations.

Difficult situations. But it's the same fundamental question for the Lord's people. Who will stand for us? Where is our hope? What is our answer? Where should we run? When is justice going to come?

[6 : 28] What should we do? How should we respond? Well, welcome to the very real and the very raw world of Psalm 94. Many commentators, as they interpret this psalm, they conclude that Psalm 94 is out of place here.

But a context work. It's in the middle of these psalms about God's majesty, God's reign. And these psalms about our response to that as we sing his praises that there is no one like him, that he reigns, that he's on his throne, that no one is going to topple him from that throne.

And Psalm 94 seems to be interrupting the flow of that. Those pattern of psalms. And they say, why is it here? Why is Psalm 94 here?

Now, it may well be that there's no connection between psalms. But let me just pitch you an idea here, okay, that I've been thinking about all week. As you read Psalm 93 and Psalm 94 together, you notice that they both talk about thrones.

Verse 2, Psalm 93, God, your throne is eternal. Your throne is eternal. Verse 20 of Psalm 94, can a corrupt throne be allied with you?

[7 : 39] Implication, your throne, God. Do you see how both psalms are thinking about God's throne? Because if things are right with the world in Psalm 93, they seem to be all wrong with the world in Psalm 94.

Does God still reign? Will God stand by and watch as the wicked cause havoc to God's people?

Now, those are real questions in life. They are real questions of the life of faith.

We know those times in our lives. And if we don't know them yet, it's only a matter of time before we do. You know those times in life when feelings have faded? Those times in life where songs, they just bring no comfort?

Those times in life when Christian cliches just will not cut it anymore? Times when as God's people, we feel battered and we feel bruised. And we find ourselves asking as we go up against the world, as we feel the pinch, as we feel the heat.

Who is this God that we claim to know? Who is our God? When I grow up, I used to go to the Boys Brigade. I only used to go along really to be part of the football team.

[8 : 46] If you didn't go on Wednesday night to the Boys Brigade meetings, you didn't play football on a Saturday. So I was there every Wednesday. And I soon learned the theme song of the Boys Brigade. Does anybody know it? Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?

I'm not going to sing it, okay. When the clouds unfold, they're wings of strife. When the strong tides lift and the cables strain, will your anchor drift? Or will it firm remain? That's life.

Friends, in our darkest moments, we need our deepest theology. It's why we need to fill our souls with God's Word and allow God's Spirit to bring that Word to bear in our lives.

And it's why these Psalms that we've been going through over the last few weeks have been so precious for God's people down to generations who are feeling the heat for standing for Jesus because they reveal to us who this God that we worship really is.

Who is this God? Right, track with me. Here's where we've been. Psalm 90. God is the Eternal One. Our lives. We heard it in Psalm 1 in the kids talk, didn't we? Our lives are here today and gone tomorrow.

[9 : 52] But God has always been and God will always be. He is the Eternal One. Psalm 90. Psalm 91. He is our refuge.

He is the one that we can run to and find shelter and safety in times of darkness. He is our refuge. Psalm 92. He is faithful. He's not going to change.

He is the ever-constant one. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, meaning that you and I won't wake up tomorrow, pick up our Bibles, read a promise, and think that doesn't apply because God's changed. He's the same.

And Psalm 93. God reigns. He's in control of all things. Nothing happens without his permission. He is in control of all things at all times. Now, they are not promises simply to put on the side of a coffee cup.

Those are promises to put deep in the chambers of our hearts and build our lives upon. And the connection, I think, between Psalm 93 and Psalm 94 is God is reigning, and even in situations when it doesn't look like he is, the conviction of this person of faith who has poured their soul onto paper, Psalm 94, is that even though that doesn't look like it's true, it still is.

[11 : 09] It still is. And so into this dark situation, the psalmist brings to mind four truths about who his God is. And as we travel through these today, my prayer for us this morning is that it strengthens us, that it encourages us, that it challenges us, and it equips us to be his people who proclaim his praises in the world.

Are you ready for this? When we travel through these, these will be really quick, okay? Here's the first one, verses 8 to 11. Who is God? He's the all-knowing one. He's the all-knowing one.

The wicked say, see the connection here, the wicked say what? God takes no notice. The psalmist replies, you guys take notice. Lovely little play on notice there.

And he offers them some heavenly wisdom into a world full of poor wisdom. Now, we were up in that school in Glen Almond last week. And the first poster you notice as you go into one of their rooms, and it says this.

And get this for wisdom, okay? Life is not about the destination. It's about the journey. Right? Life is not about the destination. It's about the journey.

[12 : 21] And I read it, and I thought, really? Because whoever came up with that has clearly never been in a car with small children. Let me tell you, when I was in the car last week, a few weeks ago we were on holiday, and the voice comes from the back, Daddy, I've got a sore tummy.

As the driver, I am not thinking about the journey. I'm thinking about getting to the destination before the inevitable happens. And we didn't get there before the inevitable happens. Life, that is just pure wisdom.

Do you see? Here is the psalmist offering some heavenly wisdom to his world. Here it is. Look at it with me. God is the creator, and you are his creature.

God is infinite, and you are finite. God is the unformed, and you are the formed. He who came up with the idea of the ear, he can hear.

He who created the eye, he can see. He who created the world in wisdom, he is not lacking in understanding.

[13 : 25] And he knows all human plans. I think particularly in the context with those against his people, he knows that those plans are futile. Now, see what this is saying.

The fact that God hasn't brought full justice yet is nothing to do with his blindness. It has everything to do, rather, with his kindness. His gracious desire to give human beings, out of his great love and mercy and grace, an opportunity to repent and come to know him and receive new life in his son, Jesus Christ.

That's the reason the Bible gives. Wherever you are in relation to this God today, let me ask you just to stop and think about the wisdom that you're building your life upon.

Is it the world's wisdom? Is it about the journey, not the destination? Or is it God's wisdom? The Bible would say that the fear of the Lord, knowing who he is and knowing who you are, that is the beginning of wisdom.

Who is this God? He is the all-knowing one. Secondly, verses 12 to 15, he is the never-changing one. The testimony of the psalmist is that even in these testing times, God was teaching him, God was molding him as a loving heavenly father, and he was doing it by his word.

[14:49] Do you see? It's a lovely testimony, isn't it? As Elizabeth Elliot used to say, God will not protect his people from anything that will make us more like Jesus.

Is that not true in life? That there's some things that we can only learn when we walk with God, not around the storm, but we walk with God through the storm.

As he teaches us to lean less on who we are, to lean less on our change in circumstances, and to lean more on who he is. Sam's confidence, having come through all of that, are the words of verse 14.

And I think this is the theological heart of this psalm, that the Lord will not reject his people, that the Lord will never forsake his inheritance. That is a wonderful truth.

That God is not like us. Praise him that that is so. When it comes to being faithful to his people, do you see, God has not just signed himself up for an 18-month contract. He is not going to go on money supermarket and compare to see if he can get a better deal in terms of a people to love.

[15:56] He's not going to have people in a trial period to figure out if he wants to say, this is why the psalmist uses the covenant name of the Lord here. Capital O, sorry, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D.

This is the God who said to his people, I am your God, and you will be my people. God is fully committed to his people.

God will never abandon his people. What a wonderful truth, a promise to cling to and know in the darkest of times that God is going nowhere. God is going nowhere.

Who is this God? He's a never-changing one. And thirdly, verses 16 to 19, he's the ever-present one. There we are, the big question at verse 16, who will stand for me?

Who will stand for us? Now feel the testimony here that the psalmist gives us. If we read this together, maybe this is where you are this morning. We'll let the psalmist speak to you about his, verse 18, my foot was slipping.

[17:01] I was falling. And God, you rescued me. Reading that, I was reminded of that quite incredible video you might have seen of Mamadou Gassama, the man who scaled that apartment complex in Paris and reached out to that toddler and pulled them in.

This is the language that the psalmist is using here to describe his spiritual battle that he was in, the fight of faith. God, I was almost gone, but you lifted me up when I was ready to give it all up.

Presumably, he's talking about abandoning his confidence and who this God is because he'd had enough of watching the wicked win. God, you reached out and by your grace, you took hold of me. When my chest was heavy and anxiety was pressing in, God, you were there and you consoled me. God, when I was falling, your unfailing love, lovely description, isn't it, of God's love unfailing.

God, you supported me. Wonderful testimony of God's sustaining grace and how did God do it? Well, it's interesting to note that there's nothing in this psalm to suggest that the comfort came for the psalmist because the situation for them get any better.

[18:20] How true is that for the Christian as we pilgrim away through this life that our hope is not in the fact that our circumstances might get better because history is filled with the testimonies of people of faith down to generations for whom that was never true.

That's not where this consolation came from. Presumably, it came, verse 12, from God's law, from God's word. As God brought words of life and truth into the psalmist dark situation, proclaimed into the situation, here's who I am and here's how things really are.

And the psalmist gets a God-sized perspective in things. That's what brought comfort. And notice it didn't just bring the psalmist relief, it brought him joy.

Martin Nimler was a courageous German pastor who spent seven years in concentration camps because he spoke out against the ungodly influence that Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime was exercising in the German church.

And he said this about his Bible, what it meant to him in those darkest, darkest of hours. What did the word of God mean to me during those years? It was simply everything.

[19 : 41] Comfort and strength, guidance and hope, master of my days and companion of my nights. It was the bread which kept me from starvation and the water of life that refreshed my soul.

Who is this God? He's the ever-present one. Fourthly, finally, who is this God? Verses 20 to 23, he's the fully righteous one.

You see, this God-sized perspective has taught the psalmist to take confidence in the truth that ultimately God is going to win the day, that he can leave it with God, that he will triumph.

See what he declares at verse 20, that God is on the throne and he does not align himself with wicked rulers. And he reigns and he rules today and one day every knee will bow before him and one day perfect justice will be done.

And it's the rule that we all crave and it's the reign that we all long for. And friends, it's the king that we all need.

[20 : 47] I found it fascinating over the last little while as we've watched the World Cup to see the reaction to England manager Gareth Southgate.

I don't know if anybody else has picked up on this. I mean, who would have thought that the must-have fashion item of summer 2018 would be a grey waistcoat? Gareth Southgate. But I asked myself, why?

I find it interesting to read a comment on social media about Gareth Southgate that captured, I thought, the reasons pretty well. And I'm paraphrasing here because I couldn't find the original tweet, but it went something like this.

At last our country has a decent leader, one who we can love, one who we can trust, and one that we can get behind. Now you read that and you think, is he talking about Churchill?

No, he's talking about Gareth Southgate. But is that not so revealing about where our country is?

Desperate need of a leader who can do right. Someone to trust, someone to follow.

[21 : 48] The problem is, going to the Bible, that we look for leaders in all the wrong places. The psalmist says, when it comes to me, when it comes to my search for someone to follow, when it comes to my search for someone to trust, I'm not looking out, I'm looking up.

I'm looking to heaven's throne. That's where he's looking. I can't help but think, sitting where we do in the Bible story of the one who, in the words of John Wesley, who left his father's throne above, whose life on this earth was perfect, whose kingdom, as we see it glimpsed in the Gospels, was full of, founded on righteousness and justice, and he surrendered his life from the cross, the place where God's unfailing love and his justice meet, and as he rescued his people for himself, paying their debt of sin on the cross, this king who defeated death and God is exalted high above every name, who rules and reigns in heaven's throne room.

There's a king worth following. I love it as you read the book of Acts, and maybe you can do this afterwards, about the first Christian martyr, Stephen. And Stephen is proclaiming to his generation the glory of the gospel about the crucified, risen, reigning, and returning Jesus.

He's proclaiming it to them, and how do they respond? Do they hear him? No, they stone him. And Luke tells us that in that moment, as Stephen breathes his last, he looks to heaven and what does he see there?

Is Jesus sleeping? Is Jesus twiddling his thumbs? No. What is Jesus doing? He's standing. As if to say, in that moment, that man is mine. I have paid his debt of sin on the cross.

[23 : 33] I have given him new life. His times are in my hands. And it's to Jesus that verse 32, 22 rather, for us, it takes its shape.

Jesus is the rock on whom we stand. Jesus is the one in whom we find refuge, because he has taken us under the shadow of his wing, and because he has made us his own.

And one day, Jesus will return to judge the world. as the king of heaven, and he will do everything that verse 23 talks about, bringing justice for his people and executing justice for those who have rejected him as king.

Who is this God? He is the fully righteous one. Friends, as we close, let me just take you back to that little Quaker congregation down in Birmingham.

Do you remember their question? Who will stand for us? John Lewis made an offer to buy their land. They receive a letter back a few weeks later, and it says this, Dear Sirs, so they're polite as well.

[24 : 40] Dear Sirs, thank you for your letter. I think you're mistaken in thinking that you were here before us, but in any event, we kindly reject your offer. But we would in fact like to make an offer to purchase your land.

As you can imagine, that response was met with much laughing and much scoffing around the boardroom, John Lewis, as they talked about it together, until they read the signature at the bottom of the letter, and it said, You're sincerely, John Cadbury.

John Cadbury, the founder, the owner of that vast Cadbury's chocolate empire, and himself a member of that unimpressive, dwindling, little Quaker congregation.

You see, knowing who is in your corner, knowing who is standing for you, makes all the difference. And as God's people here today, we have somebody far greater than John Cadbury standing in our corner. Who will stand for us?

This God of San Linty 4. Who is he? He is the unknowing one. He is the never-changing one. He is the ever-present one. And he is the fully righteous one. And that's who stands in our corner.

[25 : 45] Friends, let me just invite you just to close your eyes. We're just going to close. And in a time of prayer, but just before we finish our service and move on this morning, as I was praying about this this week, and just with our eyes closed, I was particularly thinking about those who would describe themselves right now as those whose feet are slipping.

Those who are thinking, is God really in control? And at times that's all of us, isn't it? But particularly for those who are here this morning, maybe I could ask you all with our eyes closed, maybe just really bravely, if that is you, maybe just raise your hand just for five seconds.

And let me pray particularly that this wonderful psalm would be true for you in particular.

and it would be true for us this morning as a church. Father, thank you that your word would tell us that those who put their trust in you will never be put to shame.

And I pray particularly for folks here this morning who've raised their hand, particularly for them, that this would be true in their own lives, that you would support them, that you would equip them, that you would help them stand, and that you would support them and surround them with your unfailing love.

[27 : 16] Father, thank you that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever. And so it's to you we look today. Father, we love you. And we ask that you would come and be with us now.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.