



For the first three weeks of the 2012 NFL season, replacement referees filled in for the regulars. The team owners locked out the regular refs because they couldn't agree on a contract. The result of using small college refs to judge pro games was predictable. They missed calls, took too long to make the right calls, called too many penalties, and in the process made coaches, players, and fans furious.

It all came to a head when Bill Belichick, coach of the Patriots, grabbed one of the replacement refs and was fined \$50,000 by the league. Then a game between the Packers and Seahawks was decided by a call on the last play of the game that was so clearly wrong the whole country was talking about it the next day. The media pointed out that because of the missed call, 150 million dollars changed hands in Las Vegas. Confidence in the credibility of the game was marred. Players didn't know what to expect on the field. Fans were miserable; newspapers called it "chaos" and an "outrage."

All of this because the rules of football weren't being correctly applied by the judges on the field. Obviously, there are many people who care about football, and so they care about having judges who do their job correctly, but deep down all of us feel the same way about life. We all realize the importance of someone making the correct call on not only our actions but those of others as well. For some, that's where God comes in. We believe God is a righteous judge who knows everything. He never gets it wrong. He never throws a flag when it shouldn't be thrown. His righteous judgments are the very thing that bring order and meaning to life, just like the enforcement of the rules do to football. Without him, everything is chaos, and everyone is miserable.

The Situation He Faced: False Accusation

No where is our faith in a righteous God tested more than when we're falsely accused. Have you ever been misunderstood? Have you ever been talked about behind your back in ways that were false? Has your reputation ever been tarnished or smeared because someone spread lies about you? Have you ever done the right thing but had your motives questioned as if you were wrong? All of us have gone through that. Not only does it hurt, but it outrages us. How true it is the most powerful weapon people use to hurt others isn't a gun, a sword or even a bomb; it's that small slab of membrane between our teeth we call the tongue.

How do you handle it when you're falsely accused? What do you do when someone attacks you with their words, words you know are lies? This is what David experienced before writing Psalm 7. You may have noticed each of the psalms have a title, called a *superscription*. Often it tells who wrote the psalm and how it was to be used in public worship. Sometimes it even tells us of the situation that led to its composition. In the case of Psalm 7 it says, "**A shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite.**" While it's helpful to know this was written and sung by David, we don't know what a *shiggaion* is. Most scholars believe this was some kind of musical term. Nor do we know who Cush was. He's not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, but the fact that he was a Benjamite helps us. King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was the King before David and he was greatly threatened by David. David was the upstart young shepherd boy whom Samuel had anointed. David had defeated the giant, Goliath. As you read the accounts in the final chapters of 1 Samuel you see King Saul was not only threatened by David but even accused David of treachery; of trying to overthrow him. But nothing could be further from the truth.

For example, one day Saul was pursuing David into the wilderness. Saul had to use the facilities and so he went into a dark cave. Little did he know he'd walked into the very cave where David and his men were hiding! No doubt this was a test of David's integrity. His men knew what David should do, "Now is your chance, David! Get him! Kill him!" But David, well trained in Israeli covert operations, tiptoed near Saul while he was doing his business and nicked off a piece of his robe without Saul knowing it. If you've ever been in a pitch black cave you know how this could happen. After Saul left the cave and walked some distance away, David rebuked his men for wanting to attack Saul. He also wanted Saul to know he'd never harm him, so he came out of the cave and called to Saul, showing him the piece of his robe. He said, "**Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you...**" (1 Sam 24:9–10). No doubt Cush was one of the men who was feeding Saul lies about David's motives and actions, and this went on for years.

The question is, how did David respond to that and how should we respond to similar things that happen to us? Psalm 7 is David's response.

He Takes Refuge in God

Lord my God, I take refuge in you;
save and deliver me from all who pursue me,
or they will tear me apart like a lion
and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me
(verses 1–2).

The first thing David does is take refuge in God. He begins by telling the Lord he takes refuge in him and he cries out to him to save and deliver him from those who pursue him. Notice how realistic he is about what they'll do to him if they're allowed to run him down. In graphic detail, he says not only do they pursue him but if they catch him they'll tear him apart and rip him to pieces like a lion would her prey. We've all seen footage of a lioness waiting in utter stillness and then leaping forward and chasing down her prey—maybe a gazelle—and feasting on the carcass one limb at a time.

I remember as a boy being confronted by an older and much bigger boy from the other side of the tracks. Something I did set him off and he told me he was after me. If he saw me anywhere in town he'd rip me to pieces. I was terrified. I was too embarrassed to tell anyone, and so for several months I just went to school and came home and I stayed home. That's how David felt, but David did something I failed to do. He turned to the Lord and made the Lord his refuge, his safe place, his fortress. Far too often we run for help to the wrong places. It certainly wouldn't have been wrong for me to tell my parents or friends what I was dealing with, but ultimately only the Lord could be my safe place. Several times in the psalm he addresses the Lord in a very personal way as "my God." David has a relationship with God. He has a track record of turning to God and the Lord has never let him down.

What happens when you run to the Lord as your refuge? He becomes bigger than your problem. Things are put in perspective. You can take a very small coin like a penny and if you put it up close to your eye that's all you see; everything else is blocked out by that little penny. But if you just move it away, it's put in perspective, and it doesn't look so big compared to everything else. When you make the Lord your refuge, you see your problems and fears in relation to him, his greatness and his grandeur, and they don't seem nearly so large.

He Invites God to Evaluate His Actions

Lord my God, if I have done this
and there is guilt on my hands—
if I have repaid my ally with evil
or without cause have robbed my foe—
then let my enemy pursue and overtake me;
let him trample my life to the ground
and make me sleep in the dust (verses 3–5).

The second thing he does is invite God to evaluate his actions. Notice how he says, "*...if I have done this...*" It's clear he's being accused of something very specific. We get a better idea of what that might have been in verse 4, "*...if I have repaid my ally with evil, or without cause have robbed my foe...*" You wonder if he's talking specifically about King Saul here. It's interesting that after David nicked off a piece of that robe and before he called out to Saul, the Scripture says, "*...David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord'*" (1 Sam 24:5–6).

You can tell that David had a very sensitive conscience, especially when it came to Saul. He's willing to invite the Lord to examine his heart. When we're accused of something, we should always ask ourselves some questions: "Lord, in this situation, what could I have done differently? Is my conscience really clear? Is pride in any way blinding me? Have my words been unfair, unkind, or hurtful? Have I been insensitive? Have I harbored evil and vengeful thoughts? Have I looked at this from their point of view?" Someone said, "What people say about us is never quite true; never quite false; they always miss the bull's eye, but rarely fail to hit the target." I can think of several times in my life when I felt someone had wronged me. My immediate reaction was to claim my innocence and lash back at them. But then as time went by and I searched my own heart before the Lord I saw some things I could have done differently. I may still be innocent of what I'm being accused of, but I've taken a hard look at myself and been willing to take ownership for whatever I might have done to contribute to the situation.

Ultimately, David is confident he's innocent of these accusations. He's willing to even put his life and reputation on the line. He says, "*If I have done this...then let my enemies pursue me and overtake me, let them trample my life to the ground and make me sleep in the dust.*" Literally, that last line reads, "Lay my glory (honor) in the dust." He's willing to have his reputation, which has already been slandered, ground into the dust. How many of us are confident enough in our spiritual lives to put these kinds of things on the table before the Lord?

He Calls on God to Judge

Arise, Lord, in your anger;
rise up against the rage of my enemies.
Awake, my God; decree justice.
Let the assembled peoples gather around you,
while you sit enthroned over them on high.
Let the Lord judge the peoples.
Vindicate me, Lord, according to my righteousness,
according to my integrity, O Most High.
Bring to an end the violence of the wicked

**and make the righteous secure—
you, the righteous God
who probes minds and hearts (verses 6–9).**

It's with that confidence that he goes on and calls on God to judge. When David speaks of his own righteousness and integrity, he's not saying he was sinless, but rather in this situation he wasn't guilty of what he'd been accused of. Because of that, he asks God to rise up, awaken and bring justice to bear on this situation. Notice he also sees God's judgment in its cosmic dimension. He asks the Lord not only to judge his own enemies but all the peoples of the earth. Have you ever been in a packed out courtroom before the judge walks in? Everyone is sitting there, tensely waiting for him to enter. When he does enter in his long robe, the bailiff calls out, "All Rise!" Then he says, "The court is now in session. The honorable judge so and so presiding." It's not until the judge is seated that everyone else sits and waits for him to begin the trial. David pictures God in all his glory seated on a throne with all the peoples of the earth assembled before him. He looks to that day when God will not only vindicate him but also bring an end to the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

One of the problems of human courtrooms and human judges is they're not always righteous and they're not always able to discern the minds and hearts of men. That's why what David says at the end of verse 9 is so important, "*...you, the righteous God who probes minds and hearts.*" Human judges are forced to judge based on hard evidence. God judges based on absolute knowledge of our thoughts, intentions and motives. In one sense that might frighten us. Who can stand before that? But in another sense it can be a great comfort to us because we know he knows us better than anyone else and ultimately it's his judgment that matters the most.

This reminds me of the Apostle Paul. When he was being judged by some of the people in the church at Corinth, he said, "*I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart...*" (1 Cor 4:3–5a). Paul understood God knew him better than not only his critics but better than he knew himself! Though I'm sure Paul searched his heart as David did, he knew ultimately he couldn't even take his own opinion of himself that seriously! He was content to wait until the Lord comes. This, of course, is also a warning to us to be careful in our own judgments of others. We don't see everything; we don't know it all; we can't read a person's heart. So watch what you think and say and wait until the Lord comes.

He Affirms and Unveils God's Righteousness
David mentioned the righteousness of God in verse 9. The next

thing he does in response to the accusations is to affirm and unveil more of God's righteousness. Look at verses 10–13.

**My shield is God Most High,
who saves the upright in heart.
God is a righteous judge,
a God who displays his wrath every day.
If he does not relent,
he will sharpen his sword;
he will bend and string his bow.
He has prepared his deadly weapons;
he makes ready his flaming arrows.**

He says, "*God is a righteous judge.*" Many of the images he uses here have to do with warfare. Because he's righteous, he's a shield for those who seek Him. That's what it means to be "upright in heart." It's not talking about sinless perfection, but a heart that wants to please God. For us today it points to those who put all their trust in Christ as Savior and follow him as Lord. God is a shield to you. He's your protector. But to those who say, "I can do it myself. I can run my own life," God has prepared his deadly weapons. He hasn't used them yet. He's sharpened his sword. He's lifted and strung his bow and he's taking aim. But notice the words, "*If he does not relent...*" That's a warning but it's also an invitation. What would cause God to relent except our own change of heart, our own repentance? The moment that happens, God drops his sword and his bow and he picks up his shield. The One who was your enemy becomes your friend and your defender.

There's a curious little phrase up in verse 11 that says God "*displays his wrath every day.*" What does that mean? I think it's explained in verses 14–16:

**Whoever is pregnant with evil conceives trouble
and gives birth to disillusionment.
Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out
falls into the pit they have made.
The trouble they cause recoils on them;
their violence comes down on their own heads.**

We've all heard the phrase, "What goes around comes around." What it means is a person's actions will come back to haunt them. There's a boomerang effect of evil and it's not the result of bad karma but the workings of a righteous and sovereign God. What vivid images he uses. If you're pregnant with evil, if you conceive trouble, you'll give birth to lies and disillusionment. If you dig a ditch and scoop it out, you'll fall right into it. This is God's righteousness unveiled.

The hit TV show, *Breaking Bad* makes this very point. It follows the story of Walter White, a mild-mannered chemistry teacher who has lung cancer. After receiving a terminal diagnosis, he turns to cooking crystal meth to provide for his family. As he develops a taste for the trade, Walt slowly turns into a bold but degenerate thug. What I like about the show is it doesn't soft-peddle the

consequences of sin. The show's creator, Vince Gilligan, said, "If there's a larger lesson to *Breaking Bad*, it's that actions have consequences... I feel some sort of need for biblical atonement, or justice, or something."

That comes out very clearly in one scene when Walt's younger accomplice Jesse Pinkman commits murder and then attends a Narcotics Anonymous meeting in hopes of finding relief. After Jesse shares a thinly veiled version of his crime, the group leader counsels self-acceptance. "We're not here to sit in judgment," he says, to which Jesse explodes: "Why not? Why not? If you just do stuff and nothing happens, what's it all mean? What's the point? So no matter what I do, hooray for me because I'm a great guy? It's all good? No matter how many dogs I kill, I just—what, do an inventory, and accept?" It's not surprising that Vince Gilligan believes in hell and judgment for human sin. He said, "I want to believe there's a heaven. But I can't not believe there's a hell."

A question we all should ask ourselves is what are **we** pregnant with? What's being conceived in our **own** hearts? What kind of pits are **we** scooping out? Is it a pit of worry and control and stress? Is it a pit of resentment and bitterness? Is it a pit of lust or addiction? Is it a pit of isolation and self pity? The amazing thing in all of this is that God loves us so passionately, he'll not give up on us. He'll pursue us and reveal to us the very things we put up as barriers between ourselves and him.

He Celebrates God's Righteousness

Even though he didn't see it in his immediate circumstances, David believed in the end God's justice would prevail. So the last thing he does is celebrate in verse 17.

I will give thanks to the Lord because of his righteousness;

I will sing the praises of the name of the Lord Most High.

This is now the third time David mentions God's righteousness. He celebrates God's righteousness. Sometimes we have difficulty celebrating God's righteousness. It feels hard and inflexible. We think of human self-righteousness, and we don't like that, but don't judge God's righteousness based on distorted expressions of human righteousness. God's righteousness flows from his holiness. It's the living out of his holiness. Because God is holy and righteous, we can depend on him to uphold us and protect us from attack. God's righteousness is a source of confidence and comfort rather than of fear and dismay. God, the righteous judge, is our refuge.

Again, we see how much prayer has changed David. He's moved from a man who fears he's about to be torn to pieces by a lion, to

one who is giving thanks to the Lord and singing his praises. His enemies are still there. Cush is still feeding lies about David to King Saul, but David can give thanks and sing praise to the Lord because of his righteousness.

You and I have enemies. That's one of the things we learn in this psalm. This and so many other psalms are full of enemy talk. God is the primary subject of the psalms, but enemies have a hold on second place. Our greatest enemy is the devil. It's probably no coincidence that Peter calls him a roaring lion. He says, "**Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour**" (1 Pet 5:5–8). One of the things he does is accuse you. In Rev. 12:10 he's called "**the accuser of the brethren.**" He has many ways to accuse you. He shows you your many sins and says, "What can you say in your defense? How can God possibly be at work in your life? How can you say God is for you when you live like that? You say you're forgiven, but how long do you think he'll put up with you?" When you hear those words, take refuge in a righteous God who judges righteously.

We also have an enemy in the world. Jesus said, "**If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you**" (Jn 15:18–19). Jesus doesn't say to us, "I've placed you in a beautiful world with some really nice people." He doesn't say, "Everyone is doing their best to get along and so you just need try a little harder and everything will turn out okay." It's like the ad on TV for a hotel in Las Vegas that says, "Just the right amount of wrong." That's what the world wants us to want—just enough sin to enjoy, but not enough to really have consequences. That's a lie. That's our enemy talking. When you hear those lies, take refuge in a righteous God who judges righteously.

Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." But you can't love them unless you know they are there. For those who live by faith, enemies are a fact of life. And just because we love them and pray for them doesn't mean they become our friends. Often our love for them will just redouble their fury towards us. The enemies that Jesus loved and prayed for killed him. Peter says of Jesus, "**When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly**" (1 Pet 2:23). In other words, he took refuge in a righteous God who judges righteously. Will you do the same?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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