

**Message from the Master**, Broadcast Date: **December 16, 2007**

**Sermon Series:** Little Psalms for Big Problems

**This Sermon:** [Big Problem] = Enemy Attack – “Come Quickly, O Lord” (Psalm 70)

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“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” That’s what Paul wrote to Timothy. It is a sweeping statement that puts every one of us on alert. Do we want to live a godly life in Christ? We will be persecuted. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it. We can count on being attacked in one way or another as we strive to express our faith and testify to God’s truth in ordinary living. The sooner we understand this, the better prepared we will be to cope with the situation and respond to it wisely. It is a big problem for all believers, one that needs to be faced. To suffering saints the apostle Peter wrote, “Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

Christians always have and always will have big problems confronting them. We are currently treating some of these big problems in our sermon series. Today’s big problem is that of enemy attacks, those who seek to mess with our lives and the purpose of our living in some way. We are also focusing on “little psalms” that address these big problems and equip us to take them on. The little psalm that helps us meet the big problem of enemy attacks is Psalm 70. The writer of the psalm is King David, who was no stranger to enemy attacks. The words of Psalm 70 are these:

<sup>1</sup> Hasten, O God, to save me; O Lord, come quickly to help me.

<sup>2</sup> May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion;

may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.

<sup>3</sup> May those who say to me, “Aha! Aha!” turn back because of their shame.

<sup>4</sup> But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;

may those who love your salvation always say, “Let God be exalted!”

<sup>5</sup> Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God.

You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.

David does not tell us precisely who the enemy was or when the attack took place during his life. Perhaps it was King Saul, his predecessor king who was physically large, spiritually very small, filled with hatred for David, and habitually coming after David with his army. Or it might have been enemies that later grew up within his own family, like his traitorous son Absalom, or enemies from surrounding nations that wanted a

piece of David's kingdom. David is described as a man after the Lord's heart, but this also meant he was a target of those who did not want God's will to be done. Opposition and enmity went with the territory, as the saying has it. Winston Churchill is quoted as saying, "You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life." David stood up for things of God and got enemies for his efforts. So shall we. And so we do well to face our enemies in the Lord's name as David did.

Two truths come through loud and clear in Psalm 70 – the confession of personal weakness and inability to handle the problem on his own, and the confession of confidence in the strength and sufficiency of the Lord to deal with the attacking enemies. Furthermore, this two-fold confession of personal weakness and divine strength is expressed with great urgency as well as simplicity. All of this adds up to a psalm that is always usable by us whenever we face oppression or danger.

"I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God." With these words David confesses his inability to defend and protect himself – and he makes it clear that his request from God is an urgent one. "I need help and I need it now" is the message that comes through loud and clear. When attacked by enemies intent on doing us harm, we quickly learn we are anything but self-sufficient. We may take precautions, seek to minimize danger, and avoid reckless behavior that invites trouble. Trouble will still come. During the early 1980s, a retired British couple feared that a nuclear holocaust was imminent. They determined they would find the most reasonable place to live on earth, one with a high standard of living, freedom, and unlikely to be a nuclear target. After they found their secluded nest, they sent a post card to their pastor, telling him how happy and secure they felt. When the clergyman received the card, he could not believe where they had moved: the Falkland Islands. That very day, newspapers around the world carried the story: England and Argentina were at war over the Falkland Islands! Similarly let us expect trouble and quickly admit we are not able to protect and defend ourselves to the degree that we might wish we could. David points us in the right direction – he emphasizes personal weakness and utter insufficiency to handle the problem on his own.

In a certain sense, we should be very good at confessing our neediness and inability to solve the problem on our own. Isn't that the same starting point we are constantly at when we face spiritual enemies like habitual sinfulness, guilt, and bouts with unbelief? We who were dead in transgressions and sins, who were blind to spiritual wisdom and the truth of the gospel, and both unwilling and unable to embrace Christ in faith – we know very well what it means to be in desperate need and fresh out of power to do anything to solve the problem. What we have learned, of course, is that God is strong and God is loving, and God delights in meeting our needs. He worked out our salvation without any help from us. He sent Jesus Christ to become our human brother, to live a life of obedience on our behalf, and to die the death of the guilty also for us. We were weak while he was strong, yet he became weak to give us what we needed. This same pattern is what we follow while facing foes as forgiven sinners and followers of Jesus.

That is why David, in addition to confessing his weakness and inability to save himself, also confesses his reliance on the Lord's strength and sufficiency to meet his needs. "You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay" is his well-expressed conviction. One of the endearing illustrative pictures used to teach us truths in the Bible is that of small animal known as the coney. The coney, sometimes called a rock badger, is a bit larger than the prairie dogs of North America and are usually gray, the color of many rocks. As long as the coney is on the rock it's almost impossible to see. When a predator comes to attack, the coney will run into a crag in the rock. If a vulture or an eagle wants to sweep down on the coney, it has to knock down a mountain to get at it. One thing about coney, they know where their security lies. If a coney decides to go off on the prairie, venturing away from the rock, then it's vulnerable. It doesn't matter how courageous the coney is. It doesn't matter whether or not it's been taking body building lessons at the local gym. The most courageous coney falls victim to the smallest wolf or lion. When it wanders away from the rock, a coney is dead meat. Biblical writers have taken that truth and apply it to us and our need to rely on God. That is the way of wisdom and the path David takes in this little psalm. The Lord is our strength and refuge. We confess our weaknesses and his strength at the same time.

In the middle of Psalm 70 David adds something else to his urgent cry for divine help. Here are his words: “May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, “Let God be exalted!” David has in mind other needy souls who are invited to do the same thing he does – confess their weaknesses and seek God’s strength. And then rejoice and worship the God of our salvation. David is quite confident that others who seek help and protection from the Lord will never be disappointed. In the movie: “The Bear” a bear cub whose mother died took up with a male bear. They traveled together. One day they got separated and the little bear came upon a mountain lion. When the mountain lion came at the cub the small bear stood up trying to scare it away. The mountain lion all of a sudden started backing away. The little bear cub thought he had scared him away, but what had really happened was that the big bear came up behind the little bear. It wasn’t the cub but the big bear that frightened the lion away. We may not look very frightening but we have a Father who is all powerful. He can handle our enemies.

I do not know the precise nature or number of the troubles and enemies that you must face in your life. But I know that every child of God has them and will always have them. There may be social, family, financial, career, or friendship prices to be paid when we stand up for Jesus and his truth. Our enemies may be bold and boisterous or calm and calculating. They may be openly rude or secretive and deceptive in their attempts to do us harm. Each of us knows in detail what crosses we are called on to carry. And none of us like pain. When we walk down the aisles of any drug store in America we find that one of their most popular products is pain killers. They have shelves that are packed with bottles Ibuprofen, Aspirin, Tylenol, and Alka-Seltzer. If you want, you can buy them in huge jars holding 500 or 250 pills. Other shelves contain tubes of "rub-on pain relief" like Ben Gay and Aspergel. Also there are various types of chemical ice packs and heating pads. Pain relief is big business in America. We spend billions every year because none of us want to hurt. Everyone wants to live a comfortable life. I do. You do. And so do others who may not yet have an adequate understanding of our strong and loving Lord.

I was recently pointed to an essay in which the author, a Zen Buddhist, recounted the fateful day his airplane came just moments from crashing. As the plane was literally dropping from the sky, he recalls being completely shocked by his response and astonished by the words that came out of his own mouth. He writes, “When all seemed lost, it wasn't Mu I had cried out, or even Buddha, but of all things, Jesus--in spite of everything else I had ever believed or done.” That Zen Buddhist must have learned at least some great truths about the great Savior of the world. He is our refuge in the midst of tragedy, the name above all names which we call on when all seems lost. Who else lived and died on behalf of us all? Who else can say and does say, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will never die”? Who else can say, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Mt 5:11-12). With David we cry out for unique promises and unparalleled comfort. And we are not disappointed. We echo David’s cry, “Hasten, O God, to save me; O Lord, come quickly to help me.” And he does. And he will.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, have mercy on us, for we are weak and sinful and in need of your blessings for our souls and bodies. We are needy and face enemies because we desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus. Come quickly to help us, O Lord. You are our Rock and Refuge, our strength and our shield, and you have become our salvation. Also hear us as we join to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.