

Denouncing Doeg

Psalm 52:1-9

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 52. The last time we were together in Book II of the Psalms, we were in Psalm 51, and perhaps you remember something of the ground that we covered in that familiar but very important penitential Psalm, the greatest of the penitential Psalms. Just keep that in the back of your mind, that the predecessor to Psalm 52 is Psalm 51. In some ways this Psalm stands in utter contrast with its predecessor, Psalm 51. In Psalm 51 David declares his sin against God and another man and pleads for God's mercy for himself. In Psalm 52 David declares another man's sin, his own righteousness by contrast, and prays for God's justice and judgment against his enemy. But, though there is indeed that contrast between Psalm 51 and Psalm 52, there is a profound connection, and we'll see that God-willing before we're done tonight. Before we read Psalm 52 and proclaim it, let's look to the Lord in prayer and ask His blessing.

Lord, speak to us. Your servants listen. By the grace of Your Spirit, open our ears to hear the truth of Your word for ourselves. Display Yourself; display our sin; display our Savior. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hear God's word:

For the choir director. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech.

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?

The lovingkindness of God endures all day long.

Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.

You love evil more than good, Falsehood more than speaking what is right. Selah.

You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.

But God will break you down forever;

He will snatch you up and tear you away from your tent,

And uproot you from the land of the living. Selah.

The righteous will see and fear, And will laugh at him, saying,

"Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge,

But trusted in the abundance of his riches And was strong in his evil desire."

But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;

I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever.

I will give You thanks forever, because You have done it,

And I will wait on Your name, for it is good, in the presence of Your godly ones.

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He add His blessing to it.

This Psalm recounts for us David's divinely inspired response to one of the darkest events that he ever beheld. And David had beheld some dark events in his life. This Psalm is recounting David's response to this dark, wicked deed of an evil man gives expression to the Christian's fearless confidence in God even in the face of a brutal and seemingly successful enemy. Apparently, when David first uttered the words of this Psalm, he did not know what the end of Doeg would be, but he was certain of this: that justice would be done by God. And so every Christian, in the face of injustice in a fallen world, may draw lessons from this Psalm and how we ought to respond: waiting in trust in the God of covenant love, in the God of covenant keeping, in the God of lovingkindness who will not forget to fulfill His promises to His people, which include protecting them and requiting those who harm them.

Let's look at this Psalm in four parts: the deed, the denunciation, the declaration, and the difference. The deed which occasions this Psalm is found in the first part of verse 1, in what you would call "the title of the Psalm," but which is in fact part of the first verse of the Psalm. The denunciation of the doer of that deed is found in the second part of verse 1 running all the way to verse 4. So the deed in verse 1, the denunciation in verses 1-4, the declaration in verses 5-7 and the difference—the difference between David and Doeg—in verses 8 and 9. Let's look at this Psalm in those four parts.

I. The deed

First of all, the deed. The title of this Psalm, as we've already indicated, links it to one of David's bitterest experiences. It was the massacre not only of all the priests of Nob but also of all their families, their wives, their children including their infants, and all their friends and neighbors' wives and children. Maybe you don't remember the incident. The Psalm simply speaks of it this way: "A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul and said to him, 'David has come to the house of Ahimelech.'" If you don't remember the story, it's found in 1 Samuel chapter 22. Let me recount it for you. I'd encourage you to go back and read that whole section, really beginning with 1 Samuel 20 and walking through to give you the whole context. This was before David had been crowned king of

his people. David was still at that time a servant in the house of Saul, but Saul's heart had already turned against David, and he had already purposed in his heart to kill David to the point that when in the previous chapter Saul found out that Jonathan—his own son, the one whom he desired above all else to sit on the throne of Israel after him—when Saul found out that Jonathan had been fraternizing with David and had been helping him against Saul's council, Saul threw a spear at the table at his own son seeking to kill him. And we're told that Jonathan knew at that point that his father had determined that he would do anything in his power to kill David. And Jonathan in his great love for David warned David and David fled.

David really had no place to go and at this point he had no gathered collection of followers, and so he and perhaps a few others arrived at Nob. It was a house of the worship of God and Ahimelech was the priest there. Ahimelech had been counseling David for years; he had been a spiritual father to David; he had given him counsel on many occasions; and David came to Ahimelech when he had no place to turn. He had no weapons to protect himself; he had no army to protect him; he had no food even. And Ahimelech took the showbread that had been displayed before the Lord on the previous day, before it was to be replaced by the new, fresh bread that would be put on the Table of Presence, and he gave that bread to David. You'll remember Jesus referencing this story in the gospels as He defended His disciples for picking grain as they went through the fields doing ministry on the Sabbath. But Ahimelech gave David this food, and he also gave him the sword of Goliath. He said, 'This is the only weapon we have in this house, the sword of Goliath.' And you remember David saying, 'There's no sword like it in the world.' And David knew that by personal experience, didn't he? But while David was speaking to Ahimelech he noticed—and we know this because he says this to Ahimelech's sons later on—that Doeg the Edomite was there present. And David feared that Doeg would do something no good.

Sure enough, David was supplied—he was given weapons and counsel and food—and he left the place of Nob. And Doeg the Edomite went to Saul where he was gathering with his men in counsel under a tamarisk tree and he listened to Saul, fuming, foaming at the mouth about David, saying to his men, 'What do you think if David becomes king in this land? Do you think that he will reward you, you who have been my supporters?' The implication would be that David would wipe out all of Saul's supporters. And so Saul attempted to goad these men into going and finding David and bringing reprisal against him. At this point Doeg the Edomite speaks up and he says, 'Did you know, O Saul, that David has been at Nob, and that Ahimelech, the priest of Nob, has supplied him with food and has given him weapons and has given him counsel from the Lord and bid him go his way in peace?'

You see, Doeg was implying to Saul that Ahimelech had been treasonous in his dealings towards Saul. And so all the priests of Nob are called to appear before Saul, and Saul denounces Ahimelech for his actions. And Ahimelech explains his

actions to Saul, but Saul will hear none of his explanation, and so he says to all of these men—to these men, these chieftains gathered around him—‘Kill these priests! Slaughter them in my sight!’ And none of his chieftains would do it. They would not raise their hands against unweaponed, unarmed, defenseless men of God. And Doeg steps forward and he happily slaughters 85 unarmed preachers of the word. And then, because none of the men of Saul's cohort would do such dirty, lowly, wicked work, Doeg with the blessing of Saul goes back to Nob and kills all these men's wives and children and friends and neighbors, including their infants. He slaughters them. This Psalm came from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and from the heart of David in reaction to that event.

There are two accounts of David's response to this horrific crime, to this dastardly deed. One account is in 1 Samuel 22:22 when Abiathar, the only child in the whole village who escaped this destruction, came to David to tell him that the whole town had been massacred. And David said three things. First, David, grief-stricken, said, ‘I have brought this destruction upon these people.’ You can't imagine David's heart. It would've been the last thing in the world that he would've wanted to do: to put these defenseless people in harm's way. And he says, ‘I have brought this destruction on your father's house.’ But he also says, ‘I suspected this when I saw Doeg the Edomite. I suspected that he would do something like this.’ And, thirdly, he says this to Abiathar: he says, ‘You shall come under my care and protection. And as long as I am alive, I will do my best to protect you. The only way they'll get you is if they get me.’ The other response in the word of God is Psalm 52, and we see David's theological response. He describes Doeg's character; he speaks of the consequences of Doeg's actions in the judgment of God against him; and then he contrasts the future of the righteous and the future of the wicked. And that really outlines for us the rest of the Psalm: Verses 1-4: the denunciation. After viewing the crime, or remembering the crime, or describing the crime of Doeg in verse 1, the character of Doeg is denounced in verses 1-4, the consequences of Doeg's actions and the divine judgment against them are described in verses 5-7 and the contrast between David and Doeg is set forth in verses 8 and 9.

II. The denunciation

In verses 1 through 4 we see the denunciation. David reflects on Doeg's character: he is a lying, slandering, self-interested murderer. And David reflects upon this character, and the character of Doeg is denounced; it's indicted; it's censured. This is the denunciation of Doeg. And David tells us in verse 1 that the confidence of Doeg is not in God; it's in his own cleverness. And his confidence is also based on a transient sense of reward. Doeg is staking his future and the richness of it on the reward of Saul, and it doesn't seem to occur to Doeg, “What happens if Saul's no longer there? What happens if Saul is overthrown?”

Now Doeg delights in his own cleverness; that's why David says, “Why do you

boast in evil, O mighty man?" He's self-satisfied; he's self-confident; he's confident in his own cleverness; and he's confident that he will be rewarded by Saul. And David tells us that he loves evil. He is evil, and he loves evil. Verse 3: "You love evil more than good, Falsehood more than speaking what is right. You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue."

And David calls him by a mocking name. You notice what he says in verse 1: "Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?" Now you know what that phrase means to David. When the words "mighty man" come out of David's mouth and into David's mind, usually he has in mind that band of men that gathered around him in the beginning, men who did phenomenal exploits of battle. They were the Beowulf's of their day. They did extraordinary exploits in their loyalty to David. They were mighty men of battle. Think Gimli and Legolas in *The Lord of the Rings*. Think Sergeant York, the American soldier in the first World War. Think Pappy Boyington, the Marine pilot in the second World War. These are mighty men. But he applies this to Doeg. You see, it's pure satire; it's biting irony. He's saying, 'Oh yes, you're a great mighty man. You slaughtered unarmed priests. You slaughtered their wives. You slaughtered their children, infants. You slaughtered their friends and families. Unwittingly, you came upon them in violence when they had done nothing against you and you murdered them all. You are a mighty man indeed.' And David mocks Doeg and exposes the wickedness of his character.

Doeg, you see, encapsulates the character of a wicked man. He is prideful; he is self-centered; he uses words as weapons; and for him the advancement of his own desired ends justifies any means. He trusts in his own cleverness, not in God—not in His lovingkindness but in his own wiles and schemes. He encapsulates the character of the wicked, and so we see the denunciation of him in verses 1-4.

III. The declaration

And then David gives a declaration—"This is what God will do about this"—and you see it in verses 5-7. After describing the character of Doeg in verses 1-4, now he speaks of the consequences of Doeg's desires, Doeg's choices, his trusts and his actions. And the consequence is...divine judgment. Strong words are used in verse 5: "God will break you down" and make you homeless and take your life.' You know, Dante—if you can remember *The Inferno*—puts Judas below the ninth circle of Hell in the deepest pit, in the mouth—the gaping, yawning mouth of Satan—in between two men, Brutus and Cassias. Doeg might better have been one of Judas' partners. Doeg was a despicable man and David here declares that God will break him down and make him homeless and take his life.

And we're told that there will be a didactic consequence to this. You see it in verse 6: "The righteous will see and fear." In other words, when they see this,

they will understand that there is a God above heaven to be feared, to be held in awe, to be worshipped and to be honored. They will make the right deduction; they will see that God will judge. And, furthermore, we're told that they'll laugh. Now what kind of laughter is this? It's certainly not the laughter of a person looking at the plight of another human being and delighting in some sort of warped way in his misfortune. If that were the case then the righteous would not be much different than Doeg. It could, of course, be the laughter of derision against the enemies of God. That kind of laughter is spoken of in Psalm 2 and it is put into the mouth of God Himself: "He *laughs* His enemies to scorn."

But it may well be that this is not that kind of laughter, but rather the laughter of the people of God at the unexpected but gloriously just, divine plan of God as it is unfolded: that God would bring this seemingly powerful man to justice, and He would defend those who are seemingly weak in the world before those who are seemingly powerful. I'm not sure that this captures this kind of laughter, but I was reminded—and I've got to get a *Return of the King* illustration in this sermon somehow—I was reminded of the scene from the end of the book, *The Return of the King*, when Sam and Frodo have been rescued from Mount Doom and they have been in a deep, healing sleep. Aragorn the King has worked his healing powers upon them, and when Sam awakens who shall he see but Gandalf. Now Sam has thought that Gandalf has been killed. This is the first time that he's laid eyes on the great wizard, and Tolkien puts these words in Sam's mouth: "When Sam awoke he found that he was lying on some soft bed, but over him gently swayed wide, beechen bows, and through their young leaves sunlight glimmered green and gold and all the air was full of a sweet, mingled scent." And then Gandalf speaks, "A great shadow has departed," said Gandalf. And then he laughed, and the sound was like music or like water in a parched land, and as Sam listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count. It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had never known, but he himself burst into tears. And then as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and the laughter welled up. And laughing he sprang up from his bed." You know, it's the laughter of Gandalf that Sauron the great and evil lord has been overthrown, how? Two defenseless hobbits have walked into his land with his instrument of doom and dominion and have destroyed him with it. And the only response to this is laughter. Laughter!...of how the will of the one has overthrown the power of evil in the most surprising and unlikely of ways.

And I wonder if that is something of the laughter that the righteous experience when they see the plans of the powerful dashed against the rocks by the will of Almighty God. The result of not making one's refuge in God is to be snatched up and broken down and to lose all life. The bitterest judgment awaits those who will not trust in God; the sweetest delights those who do. And David speaks of that here in verses 6 and 7. So there are the consequences of Doeg's desires and choices and trusts and actions: divine judgment. So we've seen the denunciation of Doeg and we've seen the declaration of what God will do.

IV. The difference

And then in verses 8 and 9 we see the difference between these two men, the contrast between David and Doeg. “But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever.” David, you see, in contrast to trusting in his own cleverness, his own wiles, his own tongue, his own schemes, he trusts in God. Doeg trusts in himself and in Saul; David trusts in God. David trusts—and you see this in verse 9—David trusts in God's settling of accounts with Doeg. “I will give You thanks forever, because You have done it, And I will wait on Your name, for it is good, in the presence of Your godly ones.” David is ready to wait for God's judgment to be visited. He will not put God on a timetable—‘God, you will deal with this now.’ No, he will wait for God to do his justice and judgment. But David is secure because of God. And just as he promised security to Abiathar, he knows that he is secure because God has promised him security. These two men are trusting in two different things.

But I want you to think for a few moments. This Psalm occurs immediately following Psalm 51. The events of Psalm 52 occurred years before the events which led to David praying Psalm 51. And if you think about it, if you think about what we learn about David in Psalm 51 and the incident which led it to be prayed, in the end the only difference between David who murdered one of his own mighty men and Doeg who David mockingly called a “mighty man” for his murder is God's grace and God's word. In the end the only difference between David and Doeg is God's grace and God's word.

And this is seen in David's appeal for forgiveness in Psalm 51. We're told in Psalm 51:1 that this prayer was prayed not because David was by nature a better person than Doeg but because the word of God came to David from Nathan. And David himself in the prayer that he prays casts himself upon the grace of God. The repentance which flows from the heart of David is not the cause of God's grace to him; the grace of God to David is the cause of the repentance which flows from that grace.

And so in the end the only difference between this exceedingly wicked man, Doeg, who in the final analysis does a deed no less wicked than David though he may have killed more innocent men—the difference between these men is the grace of God intervening in David's life by the word of God. Oh, my friends, do you see why it is so important that Lord's Day after Lord's Day as God's word goes forth that we do not spurn that word of grace which comes to us from His word? It may be...*it certainly is*...the only difference between us and destruction. May we heed it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, it is easy for us sometimes to pray, “But for the grace of

God there go I," when the person to whom we are pointing is a person of respectable social sin. It's much more difficult for us to assess ourselves to be Doeg apart from grace, but that is what David was and that is what all of us are apart from Your saving grace. Help us never to forget it, that between us and destruction stands only Your grace, Your word. Help us to respond to Your word then in that light: that it is the messenger of salvation to those who believe in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Would you stand for God's blessing? Peace be to the brethren and love with faith through Jesus Christ our Lord until the daybreak and the shadows flee away. Amen.

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