

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 12

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 12

Overview

Based on a 2002 study from the University of Massachusetts psychologist Robert S. Feldman concludes, “People tell a considerable number of lies in everyday conversation. It was a very surprising result. We didn’t expect lying to be such a common part of daily life.” The study was based on ten-minute conversations and found that 60 percent of people lied at least once during the conversation with an average of two to three lies per conversation. That’s in just ten minutes! Lying has become a part of our culture and, in some ways, a very acceptable sin.

Psalm 12 is a psalm that compares the deceitful speech of some with the pure, faithful words of the Lord. It is an individual lament psalm where David cries out against those who would speak lies and flattery. He cries out both for protection against lies, but also by comparison offers a warning to those who would speak in this way.

Structure of the Psalm

The psalm is a prayer that is divided nicely into two halves with the Lord’s answer as the dividing point.

1. Prayer and reflection on those who speak lies and flatter – 12:1-4
2. The Lord’s answer – 12:5
3. Prayer and reflection of thanksgiving to God for His words and what they will do – 12:6-8

Prayer and reflection on those who speak lies and flatter – 12:1-4

- :1 - “Help” – Beginning with the imperative emphasizes the need in the Hebrew language.
- “sons of men” – This phrase acts like a bookend for the psalm as it appears again at the end of verse 8. It demonstrates that this lament is focused upon the wickedness of the human condition.

- There is surely a lament for David at the lack of faithful, God-fearing people around him.

*How do we equip ourselves for a world that is daily less “godly” and “faithful”? **Read Jeremiah 6:15***

How does this verse reflect our world?

- :2 - “speak falsehood” – The same Hebrew word is used in prohibition about taking the Lord’s name in vain. (**Exodus 20:7**) It is also used in prohibition against giving false testimony. (**Deuteronomy 5:20**)
- “with a double heart they speak” – The NIV translation here is frankly terrible. While it conveys the sense of the verse it doesn’t convey the actual words and thereby misses the nuance of the idea of a double heart or double mind. Translated exactly the second half of verse 2 would read: “with heart and with heart”. Obviously the meaning of the verse is a deceptive heart and intention, but translation matters!

a. A similar idea is expressed in James. **Read James 1:8 and 4:8**

What does James mean by double-minded?

How does confession help us not be double minded?

- :3-4 - These verses are asking that the Lord would cause those who speak lies to be muted by the cutting off of their lips or tongue! This may seem extreme to us, but Jesus uses similar extreme metaphors in the Sermon on the Mount.

Read Matthew 5:27-30

What does Jesus mean in these verses?

How can we apply these verses to our lives?

- “tongue” – the Bible sees the tongue as the primary tool of speech. Therefore the tongue is the responsible organ for irresponsible speech.

Read James 3:1-10

What is James’ warning to us in these verses?

Why is it so hard to tame the tongue?

What are some things that you can do to curb what you say?

The Lord’s Answer – 12:5

- :5 - This is the turning point of the psalm and it is the most straightforward answer the Lord could give! Notice that even though we have only been talking about speech and not actions, the Lord regards the result as “devastation”.

Why is our mother’s saying, “Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me”, simply not true?

How are words greater weapons that cause deeper wounds?

- Notice again we come across this notion of the Lord “arising” to act on behalf of the faithful. We shouldn’t regard this as meaning that the Lord has been “sleeping on the job” or “disinterested in the plight of man until man asks for help”. Instead the word “arise” highlights a particular action that the Lord takes in the midst of His continual care for His people.

Prayer and reflection of Thanksgiving to God for His Words and What They Will Do – 12:6-8

- :6 - The words of the Lord stand in stark contrast to the words of those who speak lies like in 12:2. The Lord’s words are pure. The image of God’s words being refined isn’t meant to suggest that the Lord’s words need to be refined. The emphasis here is on the end product not the process. They are words that are as pure as though they have been refined “seven” times. Throughout Scripture seven is the number of perfection or completeness. So the idea that the Lord’s words are purified as if they were refined seven times is meant to state that they couldn’t be purer.
- :7 - Here the psalmist, David, essentially acknowledges and repeats back, reflects, what God had promised to do in verse 5. This is the heart of worship that we reflect back to God the wondrous things that God has done for us.
- There is a contemporary song that sums up this idea of worship well: *I’m coming back to the heart of worship, because it’s all about you, it all about you, Jesus. I’m sorry, Lord, for the thing I’ve made it. It’s all about you, it’s all about you, Jesus.* Contemporary music is often accused of being only about making us feel good, here from at least one artist is the acknowledgment that worship should be about Jesus. Or in “Lutheranese”, worship should be “Christological”.
- :8 - If there were just one verse in the Scriptures that described perfectly the world we live in, here it is. Our world exalts what the Scriptures would call “vile” or “worthless”, depending on your translation. We celebrate all the wrong things and exalt as great all the wrong behaviors and ideals. Here the psalmist is able to state it rather matter of factly because His prayers have been answered.

How can we approach a world that celebrates the vile?

What are our first steps with those closest to us that are pursuing a path that could in the end lead to their eternal destruction?

*Note **Romans 1:26-32***

Summary

Words are powerful weapons. They may be used to wound and lie and falsely flatter as they do at the beginning of this psalm. They may also be used to bring one to confession and speak words of forgiveness, which are the most powerful words of all.

Closing Prayer