

Psalm 17

“As the Apple of His Eye”

November 12, 2023

1. Intro

- a. I don't know if anyone has ever tried this before, but it is nearly impossible to INTENTIONALLY poke yourself in your eye
 - i. Don't try it now – I don't want us to have to rush anyone to the ER this morning! – but if you slowly move your finger towards your eye, your eyelids will automatically start blinking, and will shut as you get almost to the surface of your eye
 1. This is an automatic reflex that our bodies have been designed with called the “blink reflex”
 - a. As objects get close to the eye, a nerve in your brain sends a signal to a nerve on your face, and your eye blinks
 2. Science would say that this is an evolutionary response that our bodies have adapted over millions of years
 - a. But we would say that this is by the incredible design of our Maker, God Almighty
 - b. In His wisdom, God has wired us in such a way that one of the most complex parts of our entire body, the eye, is protected by a reflex that we have no control over AT ALL! How crazy is that?!
 - i. If you see an object coming toward your eye, you can't NOT blink
 1. UNLESS something is wrong in your brain
 2. Doctors have discovered that sometimes people who have suffered a stroke, or who are beginning to show signs of having Bell's Palsy, have lost this blink reflex
 - a. For something in their brain has become damaged
 - ii. This incredible reflex was designed for one purpose, to protect your eye, specifically, the PUPIL of your eye, from harm
 1. Or, as David would say in Psalm 17:8, the APPLE of your eye
 - a. Let's look at this Psalm together...

b. Psalm 17

- i. *A Prayer of David. ¹Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit! ²From your presence let my vindication come! Let your eyes behold the right! ³You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. ⁴With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. ⁵My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped. ⁶I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words. ⁷Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand. ⁸Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings, ⁹from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me. ¹⁰They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly. ¹¹They have now surrounded our steps; they set their eyes to cast us to the ground. ¹²He is like a lion eager to tear, as a young lion lurking in ambush. ¹³Arise, O LORD! Confront him, subdue him! Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword, ¹⁴from men by your hand, O LORD, from men of the world whose portion is in this life. You fill their womb with treasure; they are satisfied with children, and they leave their abundance to their infants. ¹⁵As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.*

c. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings

- i. As was so often the case in David's life, he had found himself surrounded by his enemies
 1. These enemies, filled with arrogance and wickedness, were seeking to destroy David, and to “cast him to the ground”
- ii. So David does what all of us should do in such a situation, he prayed to the Lord
 1. He realized that there was nothing he could do in these circumstances, so he pleaded with the Lord for his rescue

- a. Just as our eyes need the protection of something outside of our control, David understood that this situation was outside of his control
 - b. Just as we highly value the pupil of our eye, David prayed that God would keep him safe, as the apple of GOD'S eye
 - iii. This is a wonderful expression, isn't it?
 - iv. We understand that God is not a man, but if He actually did have eyeballs like ours, nothing could EVER touch those eyes
 - 1. Not because God has an amazing blink reflex, but because God is God!
 - 2. And one of the things that makes God, God, is that He sees EVERYTHING
 - a. His eyes see the farthest expanse of the universe, and His eyes see the tiniest of ants on the ground
 - b. His eyes see every single star throughout the heavens, and His eyes see the uncharted depths of our oceans
 - c. His eyes see the actions of both the righteous and the wicked, and His eyes see into the deepest recesses of our own hearts
 - v. The eyes of God see EVERYTHING
 - 1. And He would NEVER allow His eyes to be damaged
 - a. So when David prays to the Lord, "Keep me as the apple of your eye," he is entrusting himself FULLY to God's care and protection over his life
 - i. May the Lord guard me as He guards the apple of His own eye
 - ii. Again, what a wonderful expression of trust and faith!
- d. But this isn't the first time this expression is used in the Scriptures
 - i. Turn with me in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 32
 - 1. In this chapter, we find the song of Moses, which Moses sang after he had commissioned Joshua to lead Israel into the Promised Land
 - a. This song is beautifully poetic in its language, and it sweeps not only through the history of Israel, but also speaks prophetically of Israel's future – we could easily spend multiple sermons just looking at this one song!
 - 2. But the verses I want to focus on this morning are verses 9-10,
 - a. *⁹But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. ¹⁰He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.*
 - ii. In this song, Moses' language points to the time when God scattered the nations after the tower of Babylon incident, and how he divided mankind over the earth
 - 1. But Jacob, the nation of Israel, would be THE LORD'S portion
 - a. They would be HIS allotted heritage out of all the nations of the earth
 - b. And, even though Israel would be repeatedly oppressed throughout their lifetime, Moses says that God "encircled him, and He cared for him, and He kept Israel as the apple of His eye"
 - 2. Again, if Moses is singing this song prophetically, then we see this prophecy fulfilled over and over throughout Israel's history, don't we?
 - a. The number of empires that have come against the nation of Israel throughout world history is astounding
 - i. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Roman Empire, the Muslims, Hitler, the vast majority of the Arab nations today
 - 1. Israel has repeatedly been the target of destruction of these empires for centuries
 - 2. Yet they have survived it all, haven't they?
 - iii. And we know that it is for this reason...
 - 1. *⁹But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. ¹⁰He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him AS THE APPLE OF HIS EYE.*

- a. Surely David had these verses in mind when he prayed to God for his own protection from the enemies that surrounded him
- e. But David would not be the only one to refer back to this expression of “the apple of God’s eye”
 - i. Turn now to Zechariah, chapter 2
 - 1. Zechariah isn’t a book we often go to, so if you first go to Matthew in your Bibles, and then turn back a few pages, you’ll find Zechariah as the second to the last book of the Old Testament
 - 2. If you’re not familiar with Zechariah, it was written during the time of Israel’s captivity, under the rule of Darius the Mede
 - a. So this would be after Nebuchadnezzar’s death, and before the release of the Jews by King Cyrus of Persia
 - b. Zechariah was a prophet during this time, and he was given a series of visions regarding Israel’s future
 - i. The similarities between what Zechariah sees and what John sees in the book of Revelation are pretty amazing
 - 1. But for our purposes here this morning, lets look at chapter 2, starting in verse 1
- f. Zechariah 2:1-13
 - i. *¹And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand! ²Then I said, “Where are you going?” And he said to me, “To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length.” ³And behold, the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him ⁴and said to him, “Run, say to that young man, ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock in it. ⁵And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD, and I will be the glory in her midst.’ ⁶Up! Up! Flee from the land of the north, declares the LORD. For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, declares the LORD. ⁷Up! Escape to Zion, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon. ⁸For thus said the LORD of hosts, after his glory sent me to the nations who plundered you, for he who touches you touches the apple of his eye: ⁹“Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me. ¹⁰Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. ¹¹And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. ¹²And the LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.” ¹³Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.*
- g. We need to grasp the importance of what Zechariah is seeing here...
 - i. This isn’t a prophecy about Israel’s return to Jerusalem after their captivity in Babylon and Persia
 - 1. Look at what the angel says to the man in verse 3...
 - a. Jerusalem will be a city without walls, because there will be SO MANY PEOPLE in her midst
 - b. And the reason why there will be so many people in her midst is given in verse 11, because MANY nations will join themselves to the Lord
 - i. And, incredibly, God says that these ALSO will be His people, and He will dwell in THEIR midst
 - ii. So again, this isn’t concerning the return of the Jews to Jerusalem that we see in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah
 - 1. This prophecy concerns the gathering in of the nations, as they are brought into the chosen people of God
 - a. This prophecy concerns YOU, and ME, and all who make up the Church, the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ!
 - b. Peter makes this abundantly clear in 1 Peter 2:9-10, when he says,
 - i. *⁹But you, CHRISTIANS, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not*

a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

- iii. Church, this is the reality that the Scriptures lay out before us
 - 1. Once you were not a people, but NOW, because of the sacrifice paid by Jesus Christ on the cross, you are God's people!
 - 2. Once it was only the nation of Israel that was the apple of God's eye, but NOW, because Christ has been set in Zion as the chosen and precious cornerstone, you are now ALSO the apple of God's eye!
 - a. This is Paul's entire focus of Romans chapter 11, as he uses agricultural language to show how we were once wild and unruly branches of a tree out in the wilderness, but NOW, we have been grafted into the tree of Israel
 - i. Instead of the wild olives of the world that are inedible and useless, we now bring forth fruit that is full of nourishment and satisfaction and life
 - ii. Not because of anything we have done, but ONLY by the mercy of the God who has grafted us in
 - h. Brothers and sisters in Christ, WE, the Church, are the apple of God's eye!!
 - i. So, knowing that, we can now go back to Psalm 17, and we can interpret it in light of the mercy shown to us in Christ, as we see three themes in David's words
 - 1. The first thing that we must see is the promise of persecution for the Church
 - 2. The second thing we must see is the call to holiness for the Church
 - 3. And the third thing we must see is the promise of protection for the Church
2. First, the promise of persecution for the Church
- a. We find David in this Psalm going to the Lord in prayer, as he is surrounded by deadly enemies, the wicked who do him violence
 - i. In verses 10-12, David writes of these people,
 - 1. *¹⁰They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly. ¹¹They have now surrounded our steps; they set their eyes to cast us to the ground. ¹²He is like a lion eager to tear, as a young lion lurking in ambush.*
 - ii. Did you notice the shift in grammar that David makes in these verses?
 - 1. He starts out by saying THEY have done this, and THEY have done that... but then in verse 12, David says, "HE is like a lion eager to tear..."
 - a. There was someone that David had specifically in mind in this passage – maybe Saul, or Absalom
 - b. But his wording points the Christian to another passage of Scripture, again in 1 Peter, as Peter says to "*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*"
 - b. My friends, this is why we can be assured of the promise that the Church will ALWAYS be a persecuted people – because Satan is our adversary!
 - i. He is like a lion eager to tear, and the prey he hungers the most for are those who follow after Christ
 - 1. This is the imagery we see in Revelation 12, when we read of Satan being cast down to the earth, and in his fury at not being able to defeat Christ, verse 17 tells us that he goes off to "*make war against all those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus*"
 - ii. The followers of Jesus Christ will always be surrounded by our enemies, for Satan is always at war against us
 - 1. As Jesus said,
 - a. *¹⁸If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

- iii. We will be hated by our enemies, because our enemies do not know God – they are the sons of disobedience, following the prince of the power of the air
 - 1. We, the Church, are PROMISED persecution
 - a. So what then is our response?
- 3. Our answer comes in our second theme, the call to holiness for the Church
 - a. Notice how David prays to God in verses 3-7,
 - i. *³You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. ⁴With regard to the works of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. ⁵My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped. ⁶I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words. ⁷Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.*
 - b. In this passage, we see a call to holiness for the Church on three different fronts
 - i. First and foremost, we are called to be holy in our hearts
 - 1. Look again at verse 3... “You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing”
 - a. In this context, when David says that “you have found nothing,” he’s saying that God has found no transgressions against His commands in David’s heart
 - i. He’s held fast to God’s paths, and his feet have not slipped
 - 1. I don’t know about you, but I cannot say those things about my own life
 - a. I have strayed from God’s paths MANY times
 - b. My feet have slipped more times than I could ever count
 - c. So if God is going to visit me in the night and try and test MY heart, he would certainly find nothing...
 - i. He would find nothing GOOD
 - 2. That is why I needed a NEW heart
 - a. My old heart was wicked and calloused and full of sin
 - b. My old heart was in full rebellion against the commands of the One who formed me out of the dust
 - c. But God, who is rich in mercy, removed my heart of stone, and put in its place a heart of flesh – a heart that was now capable of putting all my hope and faith and trust in His Son, Jesus Christ
 - i. The Spirit breathed life into my dry bones, faith was given to me by the gift of God’s grace, and I repented of my sin and turned to follow Jesus
 - ii. And NOW, because I have a NEW heart, when God tests and tries my heart, He DOES NOT see my sin, He sees His Son!
 - 3. It is out of THIS reality that my heart is NOW holy!
 - a. And it is out of the overflow of Christ’s holiness in our hearts, that we can then endure the persecution that we are promised, in a way that brings honor and glory to the name of Jesus
 - i. We must first be made holy in our hearts, and then...
 - ii. Second, the Church is called to be holy in our words
 - 1. In verse 3, David goes on to say, “I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress...”
 - a. This is a tough one in our day, isn’t it?
 - i. We live in a land where freedom of speech is a God-given right, and therefore we’ve decided that we can say whatever we want to say, about whoever we want to say it
 - 1. So, when our political leaders do things that are against the Church and against God’s Word, we rant about them on social media, even though the Scriptures say to pray for those in authority, and to give them honor

2. When our bosses act in an intentionally unchristian way toward us, we gripe about them to anyone who will listen, even though the Scriptures say to work for them humbly, for we are actually working for the Lord
 3. When our neighbors laugh at us, or ignore us, or maybe even mock us for our faith, we go out of our way make sure everyone else knows that THEY are the bad neighbors, even though the Scriptures say to love your neighbor as yourself, and pray for those who persecute you
2. So the question is, as we face the promised persecution from the world, will our words be found to be HOLY?
 - a. You may be asking yourself, does it REALLY matter all that much if my words are holy?
 - b. Paul gives us a very humbling example of why our words matter in Colossians 4:3-6 – listen carefully to his words...
 - i. *³At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—⁴that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. ⁵Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*
 - c. We have been given a mission, my friends
 - i. We have been set apart by God to declare the mystery of Christ – even if we are in prison for those words
 1. Paul says THAT is the best use of the short time that we are on this earth
 2. If our words are not holy, especially in the midst of persecution, how can we speak of the wonderful mysteries of the Gospel?!
 - ii. We are called to be holy in our words
 - iii. And third, the Church is called to be holy in our actions
 1. We cannot simply talk about the Bible – we must live it out
 2. Jesus makes this painfully clear in Matthew 5:38-47... lets look at that together
 - a. *³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. ⁴³You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*
 3. Can you see why it is absolutely crucial that our hearts first be made holy before we can even think about doing ANYTHING that Jesus commands?
 - a. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to him the other cheek so he can slap that one too??
 - b. If someone unjustly takes the shirt off your back, go ahead and give him your coat as well??
 - c. What about the whole “one mile” thing?

- i. In those days, Roman law said that a soldier could grab anyone he wanted, at any time, to carry his belongings for him on his journey
 - 1. But the law stipulated he could only do this for one mile
 - 2. But Jesus says, if a person in authority commands you to go one mile, go ahead and go two??
 - d. Friends, these kinds of commands are ridiculous, UNLESS you have been given a new heart
 - i. For it is only a new heart that will realize how much Christ loved us, even while we were HIS enemies
- c. So what is the Church's response in the face of promised persecution?
 - i. Be HOLY in your hearts
 - ii. Be HOLY in your words
 - iii. And be HOLY in your actions
 - 1. That answers the question of WHAT we are to do
 - 2. But what about the question of WHY?
4. Our final theme for this morning is this, the promise of protection for the Church
 - a. David's prayer was for God to protect him and hide him in the shadow of His wings – to keep David as the apple of His eye
 - b. His prayer was grounded in the truth given in Moses' song, as Moses recalled how God chose Israel out of all the nations of the earth, and encircled them and cared for them, as the apple of His eye
 - c. And Zechariah foresaw a day when the Gentiles... you, me, the Church... will also be joined to the Lord and to His people, and we too will be kept as the apple of His eye
 - i. This is the promise that the Church must hold TIGHTLY to in these coming days
 - 1. Our brothers and sisters all around the world already know these truths, for they have been living under REAL persecution for many years now
 - 2. Christians, our time is coming
 - a. The persecution of the Church – yes, even the American Church – is promised by the Word of God
 - b. And we are commanded NOT to retaliate with our words or our actions, but to be HOLY – in everything we do and everything we say
 - c. And the reason WHY we can respond in such a counter-cultural way is that WE are the apple of God's eye
 - i. And not even death can harm His chosen ones
5. We'll close this morning with the letter that Jesus gave to the church in Smyrna, in Revelation 2:8-11
 - a. *⁸"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. ⁹"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'"*
 - b. My friends, do not fear the suffering that will one day reach our shores
 - i. Be faithful, even if it means you are slandered
 - ii. Be faithful, even if it means you are persecuted
 - iii. Be faithful, even if it means your death
 - 1. For you are the apple of God's eye
 - a. Therefore, whatever your lot, he has taught us to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul"