

'Help'

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[0 : 00] In this past week, the Scottish Government has published the Referendum Scotland Bill, which has as its purpose to set out different options or alternatives for Scotland's future.

The status quo, more powers for Holyrood independence. Well, take your pick, or not, as the case may be, as the bill would appear to have very little prospect of reaching the statute book and proposed referendum.

I don't know what you think of Scotland's future. I'm more interested in our present, in Scotland's present, or for the benefit of the Unionists amongst us, let's speak of Britain's present.

We live in somber days. We live in dark days in many ways. We are gathered here this morning to worship the living and true God.

We are gathered here in this place to celebrate and to testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

[1 : 30] We are gathered here to glory in the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus Christ. But for every one of us here, there are fifty out there who know little of Jesus and care even less.

The Word of God is, for most, at best, of historical curiosity value, and at worst, positively offensive in its claims and moral absolutes, largely ignored and certainly deemed irrelevant for our modern, enlightened, secular utopia.

The rejection of God and His words is not without its consequences. Many of our most vulnerable fellow citizens never see the light of day, clinically snuffed out in their mother's womb.

Those who do survive are destined to form part of a generation marked by moral confusion, hopelessness, promiscuity, seeking purpose and happiness in the pursuit of pleasure and the accumulation of stuff.

Marriage and the family are in crisis. Those who dare to suggest that God has designed the institution and we would do well to follow His instructions are shouted down by a chorus of ridicule and indignation.

[3 : 15] In a society where tolerance is the highest virtue, no tolerance is permitted for those who speak for God.

For those approaching the autumn of their lives, the chilling prospect of being victims of mercy killing looms large on the horizon.

Ah, but then we have the church of Jesus Christ, a clear and courageous voice for God in the public square, boldly and winsomely proclaiming and modeling God's truth in a better way.

Perhaps not. Rather, we, and I emphasize we, are so often timorous and tentative, silent and self-absorbed, fiddling, or in any case singing psalms unaccompanied, while Caledonia burns.

These are dark days. These are, could we describe them as unprecedented dark days? Well, no. Dark days, yes.

[4 : 29] Unprecedented by no means. There is, as the Word of God reminds us, nothing new under the sun. Let's listen to David as he describes his generation, and we'll read in Psalm 12, and discover that though we can describe our days as somber and dark days, they are by no means unprecedented in that regard.

Psalm 12, and we'll read the whole of the psalm, and this is the psalm that we will be considering this morning.

Help, Lord, for the godly are no more. The faithful have banished from among men. Everyone lies to his neighbor.

Their flattering lips speak with deception. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, We will triumph with our tongues. We own our lips.

Who is our master? Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise, says the Lord.

[5 : 42] I will protect them from those who malign them. And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.

O Lord, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever. The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.

The Word of God. A psalm for our day. A psalm that describes Scotland's present, but also, can we not say, prophetically announces Scotland's future, and indeed this world's future.

I want to consider this psalm under three headings. First of all, to notice a solemn diagnosis that is presented for us here by the psalmist of his nation, of his generation.

A solemn diagnosis. But then we also have a desperate cry. And then, gloriously, we have a sovereign answer. First of all then, a solemn diagnosis.

[6 : 59] And really, in the first five verses of the psalm, we have that. We have other things in these verses as well, but highlighting or focusing on this solemn diagnosis in the first half of the psalm.

The sick man that was Israel is evidenced by three disturbing symptoms. The disappearance of the godly, the idolizing of self, and the bitter consequences that are suffered as a result of these two things.

So, three elements that we want to notice under this general heading of a solemn diagnosis. First of all, the disappearance of the godly.

And the psalmist presents it in very vivid and very clear terms at the beginning of the psalm. Help, Lord, for the godly are no more.

The faithful have vanished from among men. Now, this was a common lament of the prophets, most famously expressed by Elijah.

[8 : 09] And we read the passage earlier in the service. I'm the only one left, was the lament of the prophet Elijah.

And here, David speaks in similar terms. The faithful have vanished from among men. They're nowhere to be found. The godly are no more. Now, it may well be, seems reasonable, to presume that with Elijah, perhaps David's judgment, was somewhat emboldened, if you wish, by that profound sense of tragedy that he is experiencing, and that that finds expression in poetic hyperbole, in describing the situation.

The faithful have vanished. There's nobody left. But no doubt, as with Elijah, there were yet among his day and generation those who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

But this description in poetic language and in the context of a poetic composition, though perhaps not literally precise, is essentially true.

What David is describing is a true description, or the manner he describes the situation is true. The godly are no more. The faithful have vanished from among men.

[9 : 39] It does rather beg the question, well, where are they? Where are the godly? Where are the faithful? Have they disappeared? Have they perhaps been silenced?

Is that maybe what David is describing? Yes, they're there, but they've been silenced. It's as if they weren't there. The voice of the enemies of God is so loud and so clear and so seemingly dominant that the godly have been silenced.

They're mute in the face of their powerful adversaries. Have they been silenced, perhaps? Have they been seduced? Is this the problem, that those who had been instructed in the truth of God, who at one time had held to that truth, have now been seduced by the lies of their neighbors?

The lies that can appear so attractive. The passage speaks of their flattering lips that speak with deception. Might part of the tragedy be that the godly have been deceived, the godly have been seduced?

Not innocent victims of that. They are responsible for allowing themselves to be so seduced, and yet might that not also explain the language that is used by David.

[11 : 00] The godly are no more. The faithful have vanished from among men. This is one characteristic, one part of this solemn diagnosis, but also we notice there is what we might call, and I'll explain why I use this language, the idolizing of self.

And I'm considering the words that we find, the description that is given there from verse 2.

Everyone lies to his neighbor. Their flattering lips speak with deception. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, We will triumph with our tongues.

We own our lips. Who is our master? At the beginning of these verses, David is describing the flourishing of falsehood, lying, let loose.

We're told everyone lies. Verse 2, Everyone lies to his neighbor. We're told of these flattering lips. We're told of this deception. We're told of boastful tongues.

And yet all of these things, this lying, this flattering, this boastful tongue, this deception, the root of the matter, jumps out at us from verse 4.

[12:21] We will triumph with our tongues. We own our lips. Who is our master? This is the heart of the problem.

This is the root that finds expression in lying and flattering tongues and deception. What is it that we have? God has been dethroned.

Not actually dethroned. He remains on the throne. But in the mind and in the perception and in the convictions and in the philosophy and in the thinking of this generation that is being described, they consider that they have effectively and successfully dethroned God.

And who would take his place? Who would take his place? Not Baal or some other glamorous minor deity that they could lay hold of.

No. The one who has taken the place of God is self. Self steps up to the plate and declares, I rule here.

[13:29] These are the words that we have. We own our lips. Who is our master? Not Jehovah. Not any other God. We rule here. We do what we please.

We say what we wish. We own our lips. The discourse that we declare is the discourse we want to declare.

No limits. No boundaries. No authority to tell us what is right and what is wrong. We own our lips. We'll say what we want. We'll think what we want.

We'll do what we want. Who is our master? Boldly challenging the authority of God.

This God who they consider that they have successfully dethroned. So this is part of the diagnosis that the psalmist gives us.

[14:27] The godly have disappeared. They've been silenced. They've been seduced. And everyone is claiming autonomy to do as they please.

Idolizing their own thoughts and their own selves and placing themselves in the place of God. But of course these things have consequences.

And the psalmist describes or God in fact makes reference to the bitter consequences of the folly of this generation.

You see the catapulting of God seemingly so attractive in the removal of tiresome boundaries.

We're free to live as we please and to think as we please.

What liberation to remove God from the picture. But the removal of God the dethroning of God is not without a price.

[15:28] You see this is not a bloodless or victimless coup d'etat. The weak are oppressed and the needy groan. We read in verse 5 and it is the Lord who speaks because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy I will now arise says the Lord.

The oppression of the weak the groaning of the needy is a direct consequence of the disappearance of the godly and of the idolizing of self.

This is the necessary consequence of catapulting God from the picture. It is simply the case that where God's law that has been given to us for our good and for our happiness and for our blessing when God's law is recognized and honored and obeyed there will not be the oppression of the weak and there will be no groaning of the needy where God's law is recognized and obeyed.

But where it is removed where it is cast aside then these are the consequences. Now what about us?

This is the psalmist's description of his land of his nation of his generation. What about us? Are we so different? Well, what of the features that we've noticed?

[17:04] The disappearance of the godly? Check. Is that not true of our day and of our land? The godly are no more. The faithful have vanished or certainly are vanishing from among men.

The causes? Is it shrinkage? Is it that we've been silenced? Is it that we've been seduced? I leave it to you to come to your own conclusions as to the causes.

What about the idolizing of self? Oh yes. This is very much a feature of our generation. We own our lips. Who is our master?

Who will tell me how to live? Who will tell me what is true and what is false? What is right and what is wrong? This is a motto for our generation.

Can you imagine? To illustrate the point, can you imagine on question time there every Thursday evening, those of you who watch question time, a panelist or a member of the public seeking to introduce his contribution on some matter of the day, and he introduces his contribution with these words, well actually the Bible says, or God says, can you imagine somebody being so bold as to introduce his contribution in that way?

[18 : 28] any pretension to counter the received wisdom with God's truth is simply not permissible, and it's dismissed by an ugly cocktail of pity, of amusement, or just plain ridicule.

And of course, lips that have unilaterally declared their autonomy are not bound by absolutes or anything as inconvenient as the truth.

And so, in our day and in our generation, falsehood flourishes and lies abound, be it the received wisdom on our origins, our very identity as human beings, how we ought to live in all of these areas, lies abound.

And though the emperor so often has no clothes on, woe betide the humble citizen who dares point out that inconvenient truth. And so, things that are by any reasonable measure self-evidently false are paraded as being true.

we think of some of the matters we've already mentioned in the passing, the self-evident falsehood underpinning the tragedy that is abortion, the cry that justifies this great evil, it's my body.

[20 : 03] Well, actually, no, there is another body, there is another person involved. It's so glaringly evident and obvious, and yet the lie has been so insistently and tirelessly peddled that it has become true.

Many other examples could be provided of how lies and falsehood flourish. We have, of course, in today's day, that golden and untouchable cow, which is the exaltation of a homosexual lifestyle as normal and natural.

It is self-evidently not natural, and yet the lie has been peddled with such force and insistence that it, too, has become true. We have the new atheists, darlings of the media, and the self-appointed intelligent classes, and they peddle their spectacular lies.

God is a delusion, God is not great, and their discoveries are met with plaudits and literary awards.

The idolizing of self and the deification of personal autonomy is also eloquently illustrated in the whole debate and insistent pressure for the legalizing of assisted suicide and euthanasia.

My life, my death, who is our master? Who is my master? Who can tell me how I should live and how I should die?

[21 : 41] I will decide. These are my lips, and I will decide. We have rebelled against God. We want to sit on the throne, and in our day is this a victimless coup d'etat.

It never is. It never is. Our generation also has its needy and oppressed. Every hour in Scotland, a child is aborted.

Our children have been deprived of a moral compass, and are victims of a secular agenda that dominates our classrooms and public policy. Our aged and infirm are next in line to fall a prey.

If we are indeed just clever mammals, why not put us down when the going gets tough or when the going gets too expensive for others? But the psalmist does not just give us a diagnosis.

The psalmist is no detached social commentator, no pious preacher pointing the finger of blame. He is hurting and desperate, and he responds in his day with a desperate cry.

[22 : 54] And what is his desperate cry? Well, it is made up of one word. The word with which the psalm begins, help, help, help, Lord, for the godly are no more.

Help, for everyone lies to his neighbor. Help, because flattering lips abound. Help, because of those who dominate with their lies and their false claims and pretensions.

Help, like a drowning man crying out for help. The situation is critical. The disease seemingly terminal. And yet, that final breath is well employed.

For though the cry is a desperate cry, it is also a directed cry, and it is a well-directed cry. Help, Lord.

The psalmist knows to whom he must cry. The psalmist knows who can help. The psalmist knows who is able to respond. He cries out to God.

[23 : 59] He cries out to the Lord, the covenant God, who has promised to respond to the cries of his people. Help, Lord. Indeed, as he gathers his thoughts, he is able to develop his petition further

as he cries for justice.

There in verse 3, may the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue. What about us? As we consider and recognize the society in which we live and the characteristics that mark it, what are we to do? Are we to wring our hands in desperation?

Are we to withdraw into our holy huddles and pretend that everything is okay? No, we too, with the psalmist, must cry out to God, and one word will often be sufficient.

Help! Help, Lord! Let us also, with the psalmist, cry out for justice. Let us also, if we are to be coherent in our cry, stand in solidarity with the victims of our godless society, with the needy and oppressed, those who've grown in our day and in our city.

[25 : 25] And let us think how we can do that. Who are those to whom we can reach out with a helping hand and with a willingness to support?

There is this desperate cry, then, from the psalmist, and we don't develop that further, but rather continue by asking, is the cry heard?

This cry of the psalmist, help, Lord! Help, Lord! Is the cry heard? Well, it most assuredly is heard. In verse 5, we have the Lord's response.

Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise, says the Lord. God hears and God answers.

And the sovereign words are eloquent in their simplicity, they're dramatic in their intention, I will arise. I will arise.

[26 : 30] I am not indifferent, I am not impotent, I will not remain silent, I will arise. My enemies will be silenced, justice will be done, truth will prevail, I will arise.

And we can notice two particular elements of this divine intention, I will arise. First of all, we notice that it is fundamentally motivated by love and compassion for those who suffer.

It is God Himself who introduces His intention with this truth because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise.

That is the reason why I will not remain silent. I see the weak being oppressed, I hear the groans of the needy, and this is what will drive me to stand up and to take action.

on their behalf. This divine intention motivated by love, but also the psalmist assures us, and how important for us to be absolutely clear and confident in this.

[27 : 49] The psalmist assures us that this divine intention is entirely reliable and entirely trustworthy. You see, the psalmist immediately goes on, having quoted what God says, having described God's intention, having shared with the people this great hope that God will indeed arise.

He then immediately goes on to say, and by the way, be assured of this, the words of the Lord are flawless. Oh yes, all around everybody lies and nobody can be trusted, but these words, these words are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.

So this divine intention is entirely reliable and trustworthy. It is a delicious, ironic contrast between the wicked who proclaim there in verse 4, we will triumph.

We will triumph. This is an arrogant pretension that they no doubt believe to be true, and yet, though they don't realize it themselves, is just one more lie.

You see, that's their bread and water. That is what they do best. They lie. And when they proclaim we will triumph, they are also lying. They don't think they're lying.

[29 : 15] They believe what they say, but they're lying. It's not true. They won't triumph. Ah, but when the Lord says, I will arise, that is absolutely and altogether true.

true. And yet, we might ask, but will He?

Will He really arise? We can say, and this we say as a wonderful and glorious truth.

He has already. He has already. The Lord has already stood up to be counted and very especially and wonderfully in the sending of His Son, in the sending of Jesus Christ.

God has arisen and conquered His enemies, and He has displayed them to public defeat on Calvary's cross.

[30 : 15] The psalmist cries in this psalm, help, and the word that he uses literally is, save, save. And in the fullness of time, a Savior was sent, an all-sufficient and perfect Savior, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And that same Jesus is today seated on the throne, and today hears our cry for help, and He continues to declare, I will arise.

Jesus Christ rules, and He will not be mocked. And so, Christian friend, Christian people, do not be discouraged.

Do not despair. Our God reigns. Jesus Christ rules. He will arise. Indeed, He is upstanding even now.

Yes, our voice so often seems a faltering voice, so often an ignored voice, an unheard voice, an unheard voice, and the forces against us who would oppose us.

[31 : 27] They seem so clever, and they seem so reasonable, and they seem to be winning the public debate. They seem so powerful and invincible.

And yet, the crucial word in all of that is seem. That is how it appears. That is how things seem. But it is not so.

Because if God is for us, and He is, then who can be against us? But there is in the psalm, finally, a twist in the tale, or in any way, that is one manner in which we can describe what we find in the closing words of the psalm, a twist in the tale, a reality check that would curb any naive triumphalism on our part.

And I refer to the final verse, and I ask you to ask with me the question, what's going on in the final verse? This seemingly strange ending to the psalm.

Having described this dreadful situation, having cried out to God for help, having received a clear and an eloquent and a challenging and encouraging answer, I will now arise.

[32 : 49] Then the psalm finishes in this peculiar way. The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men. Now, what's going on?

Did God not say that He would arise? Did God not say that He would win the victory? Why are the wicked still free to strut about? How are we to understand this twist in the tale of the psalm?

Well, it reminds us, and very helpfully and necessarily for our day and our generation, that the victory of the Lord that is absolute and complete and guaranteed and assured is not always visible. It is not yet visible. It is not consummated, if you wish, in the way and in the time that we might wish or long for. Indeed, for the psalmist, it would seem that things would get worse before they got better, but ultimate victory was assured.

He had the word of the Lord on it. No greater guarantee could be asked for or required. And so with us, so with us.

[34 : 05] Verse 8, and I won't tire you with applying how this verse so accurately and chillingly describes much of our own generation.

I leave that to your own capacity to apply. But we live in a day when the wicked freely strut about, and what is vile is honored among men.

And what do we say? Let them strut. Let them strut. But rest assured, their days are numbered. Let us pray.