

Wars of Words and the Search for Refuge

Psalm 61:1 *To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. Of David.*

Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer;

² from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I,

³ for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

⁴ Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! Selah

⁵ For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

⁶ Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations!

⁷ May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!

⁸ So will I ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day.

Psalm 62:1 *To the choirmaster: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.*

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.

² **He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.**

³ How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?

⁴ They only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse. Selah

⁵ For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

⁷ On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

⁸ Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

⁹ Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.

¹⁰ Put no trust in extortion; set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

¹¹ Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God,

¹² and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work.

Psalm 63:1 A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

³ Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,

⁶ when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;

⁷ for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

⁸ My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

⁹ But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth;

¹⁰ they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals.

¹¹ But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

Psalm 64:1 *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.*

Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy.

² Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the throng of evildoers,

³ who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows,

⁴ shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at him suddenly and without fear.

⁵ They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly, thinking, "Who can see them?"

⁶ They search out injustice, saying, "We have accomplished a diligent search." For the inward mind and heart of a man are deep.

⁷ But God shoots his arrow at them; they are wounded suddenly.

⁸ They are brought to ruin, with their own tongues turned against them; all who see them will wag their heads.

⁹ Then all mankind fears; they tell what God has brought about and ponder what he has done.

¹⁰ Let the righteous one rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him! Let all the upright in heart exult!"

Psalm 61-64

Wars of Words

I'M SKEPTICAL THAT MANY HERE will have ever been a king of a kingdom embroiled in a war or words so fierce that it seeks the utter destruction of your kingdom. I'm also skeptical that anyone here has never been both the recipient and the giver in smaller battles of words that cut and tongues that strike. We start them out as the tiniest of children, fighting against our siblings. It is one of the first ways the Fall begins to manifest itself in us.

Maybe your circumstances know something of this:

Dear Mom and Dad
Here's why I can't home
I can talk to either one of you just fine
When it's either one, alone
But the Thanksgiving table
Is going to be pulled out bigger
If we talk at all
One of you will pull the trigger
I used to run those battle lines
Trying to smooth over what got said
Trying to get a medal

Trying to get some shrapnel in my head
Thought it was my duty
To plead and to implore
But I caught too much crossfire
In your covert war¹

In this song, the singer is the recipient of the shrapnel from a war of words that isn't even aimed at him. But there are always civilian casualties. There are two throwers of word-missiles, the mother and the father. Both use their words to harm instead of to heal and it caused a great rift in the family. This is a pretty overt-covert war, in that everyone except the two engaged in battle can easily see what is happening.

Or what about wars of words that take place in **public forums** for everyone to see, and yet no one but those being attacked know it is happening? Have you ever been on the giving or receiving end of this? Two sides (individuals or groups, it doesn't matter) have a **growing disagreement**. Perhaps in cultivating the dispute, one or both begin to speak or act more **harshly** than they should. One side takes

¹ David Wilcox, "Covert War," *Home Again*, 1991.

offence. The other side **strikes back**. It continues to **escalate**. There is a **parting of the ways**.

This is when things really get fun. One or both parties take to the airways, telling everyone how wonderful they are, how right they are, how morally superior they are. But it is done in subtle ways. It isn't in your face like that. It is always disassociated from personal attack, even though that is exactly what it is—one step removed. They go out of their way to promote a view, a political cause, a doctrine, the original stance that was the cause of the original rift—a rift that has not been healed—but that only they and those originally part of it would even know about.

But—and this is the all-important thing—they must make sure that those with whom they have had the dispute see and hear all of this, or at least that they could easily find out. That has to be the number 1 thing. Because the war is not over. The public rhetoric is quite different from the private. In private, anything and everything was said. But in public, it has to look like nothing is going on at all. It all has to seem to innocent, impersonal. Vocabulary shifts. Speech becomes smooth as butter. It's just about ideas, nothing personal. Acting becomes vital.

This kind of warfare is everywhere. People *Tweet* like this. They *Facebook* like this. We have internet discussions in chat groups like this. Our nation's news room editorials are full of it. Commercials can do it. Podcasts. Sermons. Sunday School classes. Teachers do it during lectures. Parents do it to their children. Friends do it to their best friends. Brothers do it to sisters. And while most don't even know what is going on, it never feels quite right. Something is amiss. But we don't know why.

It is passive-aggressive narcissistic self-promotion at the hurt and expense of other human beings. It is deliberate, even if those engaging in it have themselves become self-deceived that they are unable to admit they are even doing it. Which happens all the time. It is some of the most destructive behavior that human beings can engage in. It destroys families, churches, schools, businesses, institutions, nations. I believe it is one of the greatest evils of our age, and it is destroying our very way of life because people no longer have the moral compass to even see it. It is warfare waged on an invisible level or words and motives.

And boy does it hurt. It creates a kind of loneliness almost unknowable unless you have been through it; for it

is isolating in the extreme. And deliberately so. It is the opposite of love and fellowship. Where can you turn? How can you possibly deal with it without engaging in it yourself?

Psalms 61-64: Structure or “How” of the War

Psalms 61-64 are four “psalms of David” that form a new smaller thematic unit of songs. Unlike the last grouping, none of these have a very specific occasion in David’s life in mind, though one does tell us that he was “in the wilderness of Judah” when he wrote it (Ps 63:1). Three of them are “To the choirmaster” [“For the End” LXX] (61, 62, 64). Psalm 61 is to be played “with stringed instruments.” Psalm 62 is “...according to Jeduthun” (62:1), either a name of one of David’s singers (1Ch 16:41) or the name of a tune (perhaps Jeduthun wrote it?), or a noun that means “confession” or “praise.”²

Someone has said of these psalms that they are, “Apparently intended to sketch the structure of events in a

² Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, vol. 20, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 120.

war.”³ This is not a war with horses and arrows and swords. It is “a war involving words of defamation and intimidation.”⁴ It is a war of words. Hence, the opening comments. The tongue has been a significant focus of many of the past dozen songs. In these four songs, the negative use of the tongue escalates in usage and in the things that are said.

How does this war unfold? Psalm 61 “marks the beginning of the enemies’ attack on the petitioner.”⁵ In it, there is an enemy (Ps 61:3), but you don’t really get much of a feel for how the attack is coming. The use of the tongue is mostly positive. The Psalmist offers vows to God (5) that he must perform (8).

Psalm 62 begins to give you the details of the battle. The Psalmist’s tongue is now “in silence” (Ps 62:1, 5). Meanwhile, the enemy “blesses with their mouths, but inwardly they curse” (4).⁶ This is a kind of double-speak I was alluding to earlier. Any manner of deception that has

³ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 109.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Other language of the tongue is “extortion” (10) and God’s speech (11).

the intention of destroying. This can be summarized as “the enemies prepar[ing] the decisive, destroying blow against the petitioner.”⁷ And using a word we’ve seen in the most recent psalms (“tottering”), the one being attacked is battered and ready to topple like a wall under siege about to fall to the ground (2).

Psalm 63 gives us more information. The Psalmist’s lips now praise the LORD (Ps 63:3-5). But the mouths of the enemy are “liars” (11). This Psalm “proclaims the crucial reversal in the course of the struggle”⁸ where God crushes these enemies (11).

Finally, Psalm 64 tells us the most of all about their form of warfare. They devise “secret plots” (Ps 64:2). Their tongues are “like swords” and their words are “bitter arrows” (3). They “talk of laying snares secretly” (5). Meanwhile, the psalmist is using his lips to offer a “complaint” to God in hopes that his life may be preserved (1). This song sees the end of the war in the destruction of the foes where “God himself is the war leader.”⁹

⁷ Lothar, *ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

As we begin to think about the details of the psalms, notice that Psalm 61 begins, “Hear my cry, O God” (Ps 61:1), while Psalm 64 begins, “Hear my voice, O God” (64:1). Same idea. Also, Psalm 61 begins, “You have been my refuge” (61:3), 62 sings of the refuge, “... my mighty rock, my refuge is God” (62:7, 8), and Psalm 64 ends, “Let the righteous one rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him!” (64:10). Because of the exposing nature of the attacks and the loneliness, the unprotected circumstances they create, this becomes the Psalmist’s great hope in the midst of a war of words that seek to bring him down.

David as the One Attacked

Before we get too caught up in applying this to ourselves, we want to first **consider the person of David**. For in doing this, it will lead us understand how he points to one greater than himself. And this in turn will help us see his solution better and therefore to make better application for ourselves.

It is David, the king of Israel, who writes our Psalms today. As **vs. 6** explains, Psalm 61 is a **Royal Psalm**.

“Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations!” It is king David who is crying to God in prayer (Ps 61:1). It is David who calls “from the end of the earth ... when my heart is faint” (2). “Ends of the earth” can be translated “netherworld” (Dahood), poetically depicting himself on the brink of extermination.

As you think about David and the bigger picture of this war, you need to realize that how he begins his song is with a prayer of trust in his God. Faith begins the journey. Faith alone gets you through it.

He gives several metaphors that explain the object of his faith. The first is “Rock.” David so famously sings, “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I” (2). The Rock, throughout Scripture is Christ. David knew the Second Person to be higher than himself.

He sings next of a refuge, specifically a strong tower (3). Towers were anchors for city walls that also provided refuge in times of war. From the tower you could also see and fight the enemy from a distance. If the rock and refuge are bleeding into one another as metaphors, then it is clear that only when you are firmly grounded in the knowledge and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith that you are able to

stand, to be secure, and to see and be defended from the enemies. This is exactly what David is proclaiming of himself.

Finally, he speaks of a **tent** and of **wings**. “**Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! Selah**” (4). The tent is the place of God’s special dwelling, even as the city and tabernacle were.¹⁰ It is **the Spirit** who is so often depicted as a bird. He is the one who hovers and stretches out (like a tent?) his wings at creation, at the flood, at the Red Sea, and at Jesus’ baptism. The Spirit is the one who covered our Lord who was the earlier refuge of David. Both the Son and the Spirit presuppose the Father who is always in mind in these terms, for to see the Son or to know the Spirit is to see and know the Father. The OT is full of Trinitarian language, if you know what to look for. This to me is a pause that many people in our day need to see, for too often Christianity is a NT-only kind of thing. But here is David calling upon our Triune God in prayer.

Next we want to think about **the king’s words**. Especially before thinking about those who speak wickedly,

¹⁰ Dahood says that the rock imagery here could be translated as the lofty mountain, which would also be the same kind of thing. God dwells on the cosmic mountain in his special presence.

consider the speech of the one who is going to be attacked. “For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name” (5). David’s word was in the form of vow-making. These vows may or may not be in this psalm. If they are, they would be **his confession of trust and prayer** in the first few verses. I will call to you when my heart is faint. You are and will be my refuge O God! (If they are not, they probably include vows of **worship and sacrifice** as in other psalms).

It is in the context of these vows that he speaks about the heritage of those who fear your Name. Meaning that these are what puts him in the company of the great cloud of witnesses. His trust and obedience are the instrumental causes of his salvation. No one is saved apart from them (even if both are gifts from Him).

Christ, the Greater David Attacked

In the context of this, the Royal Psalm is made known: “Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations!” (6). In England they say, “**Long live the queen.**” But this psalm carries the thought into eternity.

This is not merely asking for people to remember his name. It is asking for him to live forever. And just here, this is where the very special part of Royal Psalms comes in, for these are ultimately **psalms about Christ** himself. This is why I said we want to remember who is singing them before we apply it.

Who is David? He is the LORD's anointed. But in his office, he points to another Anointed, the Messiah, King Jesus. We have seen earlier psalms that spoke like this, which are quoted in the NT about the eternal life Jesus gained through resurrection from the dead (cf. **Ps 16:10**). Therefore, the sentiment is the same here. Only when you understand that this is first a foremost a song of the king and about The King can you sing it in its fullest meaning.

Thus it continues, “**May he be enthroned forever before God**” (**Ps 61:7**). This is similar to, “**Your throne, O God, is forever and ever**” (**Ps 45:6**), which is quoted in **Heb 1:8** of Jesus Christ. So we are on track to speak this way of Psalm 61.

The song ends with more of David's vows. “**Appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him! So will I ever sing praises to your Name, as I perform my vows day**

after day” (7). With visions of the Lord and God in his sight, David renews his vows of faithful obedience through worship. No matter what. If we were going to end our time together after this one Psalm, it would be on this thought that **looking to Christ alone** in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring us safely into the refuge of God’s love is the great hope of the believer before anything else in life occurs. And this is in the OT!

But we will not end it this way. And this is only going to reinforce how important it is that **this beginning** of your Christian life must be something that you **cultivate** when times are good so that when the wars inevitably begin, you will know what to do.

The War Begins

Psalm 62 now unveils **the horrors of the war** that is waged by the enemies of Psalm 61. Words (or the lack thereof) come into immediate focus. His soul waits for God alone **in silence** (Ps 62:1). Notice, there is no one and nothing else that he waits for. But what is he waiting for? **“From him comes my salvation”** (1).

It repeats itself in the next verse, “He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken” (2). And this is the same thing we saw in Psalm 61. Knowing that you will not be shaken if the Rock of Christ is your salvation at the beginning is the key to overcoming once the war begins. This is why it is so important as Christians to be grounded in the truth when times are good, before they go wrong.

In the song, it is only once you are grounded that you can begin to think about the attack. But it does come. “How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?” (3). Who goes after a person in the kind of way I spoke of at the beginning? The same person who goes over to a wall that is already half bent over and kicks it all the way to the ground. Usually it takes a few kicks to get it there. All the worse if the wall is gigantic and bigger “legs” are needed.

This is bullying and intimidation. It is going after those who are broken reeds and faintly burning wicks. Both walls may have started off perfectly strong and vertical. But at some point, one or both begin to **totter**. And there has been no reconciliation. If this is the moment you choose to insert

smooth words to get that other wall to slide all the way down, this is an abomination in the Lord's sight. For God cares about the broken, the bruised, the helpless. He does not treat them like this.

But we see that this was not the high beating up the low. In fact, it started off the opposite way, and now the person being attacked was actually the one in authority. “They only plan to thrust him down from his high position” (4). And how do you do this? You lie. “They take pleasure in falsehood.” You talk well about them in public. “They bless with their mouths.” But they do other things behind their back. “But inwardly they curse.” Selah.

This really does deserve a pause (they are also so appropriate!), because how often does this happen, and we partake, but don't even realize what we are doing? Oh, it is easy to know about it on the other side, when you are the one being attacked. But the flattering lips and lying mouths far too easily are justified by us because “we are right” and they are wrong. I've been focusing on the victim, Basil focused on the enemy. “There are many who approve evil deeds and say that the witty person is charming; the foulmouthed, statesmanlike; the bitter and irascible they

name as one not to be despised; the miserly and selfish they praise as thrifty; the spendthrift, as bountiful; the fornicator and lewd, as one devoted to enjoyment and ease; and, in general, they gloss over every evil with the name of the proximate virtue” (Basil the Great, Homilies on Psalm 21:3).

What is David’s response? This is where it becomes so important to remember what we have already seen. What kind of character does he have? Where was his trust before all this began? So it continues. “For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken” (5-6). This is the refrain; it repeats the first verse, but this time it comes on the other side of the war. Not before it, but during.

“On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God” (7). Do you hear how often he is repeating this to himself? As if he didn’t he would too quickly forget. A man’s glory is often seen as his job, his authority, his money, his power. But the glory of a Christian is none of those things. Only when you know that your glory is Christ alone will such attacks be able to be handled

properly. You must find your identity in him when the inevitable words of attack come.

“Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah” (8). When do you trust? Only when the going is good? No, before and during and after the war of words or whatever the struggle is at the moment. Faith alone is the only hope of finding refuge in Christ.

“Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath” (9). This is where Solomon gets his wisdom. His father also understood that the positions of men on this earth are transient. Thus, it doesn't matter if you are of high or low estate, when attacked—and everyone is—do not put your hope or lose your hope because of such things as status in this world.

“Put no trust in extortion; set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them” (10). The Ecclesiastes-moment continues. Do not turn to sin. But also, do not turn to trusting in good things so that it becomes sin. Money, especially, cannot be your end-game. Too often we spend our lives chasing the pot of gold at the end of the

rainbow and before you know it, life has already passed us by.

So the song finishes by returning to our only refuge. “Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and that to you, O Lord (Adonai), belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work” (11-12). This final statement may seem to contradict faith alone for our righteousness. But David has sung about faith alone in this psalm. This is speaking about rewards. The Apostle says something similar (Rom 2:6). He is talking about life under a covenant of works. David is too (for the unbeliever), but he has more in mind. He is talking about the faith that God gives his children, and part of that faith is a love of good works, a desire to please God. The rewards that we gain for them are not the basis of our entrance into heaven. But they are more good gifts from him as he renders the verdict, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

The War's Reversal

The blows of words begin to give way to the God of justice in Psalm 63. And is it a coincidence that this happens

just when David is “in the wilderness?” For this is where he is weakest. This is where he is hungry, thirsty, needy. He is not in a position of power. That is when God rescues.

He begins with yet another statement of trust. “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, and in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps 63:1). His trust is in the God of gods, the only one who meets him to give him living water.

He turns his thoughts to the holy city, the place where God dwells. “So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory” (2). He remembers that though he is in the desert, God is lofty and exalted and full of power. This is an important start in the fight against your own powerlessness.

“Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you” (3). You get a sense here that David doesn’t really like his life at the moment. But even if he did, God is his highest joy. So he worships in the desert with his mouth. “So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands” (4).

Though he is thirsty and hungry, he knows where the true water and food originate. “My soul will be satisfied as

with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy” (5-7). He begins to lay bare his soul.

At night, when there is **no running**, no fighting, **just the quiet** of his own thoughts, this is when he must fight the hardest for his joy and his faith. It is the time of **watching** over your own soul. The external fight caused by the war of words becomes internal with the doubts of his own mind. The only solution is to worship God by remembering that he has never let David down. He has constantly been his helper in times of trouble. How easy it is when the next thing comes along to forget the years of faithfulness that God has shown to us. Why do we do this? I don't know, but I do know that we see here how we are to respond to it.

David begins to show his desperation. “**My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me**” (8). **The Right Hand** is the title of God's Warrior—the Captain of the Army of the LORD, the Angel of the Covenant, Christ in the OT. He needs the Lord's help now. “**But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth;**

they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals” (9-10). Has it happened yet? Is the war over? No. That’s why he isn’t in his palace in Jerusalem, but is laying in a dark cave with rocks in his back trying to get some sleep for the next day of running and fighting.

But this is another Royal Psalm, and we mustn’t forget it. “But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped” (11). Why is this important? Because as we have already seen, Royal psalms point to the Lord Jesus in special ways. And it is a never-ending fascination to me to think that David calls upon Christ, even as the Psalm points to his future coming in another way, a way not of the Warrior, but of the Suffering Servant.

And **how did Jesus suffer**? It was often through words, the mouths of liars and perverters of truth who claim to speak in the name of God. That’s how he was tempted, when Satan twisted God’s word to try to get him to sin. That’s how he was put to death. It was so subtle. “His angels will rescue you,’ God said it!” “He said he would destroy this temple.” “He is a blasphemer.”

Those statements turn on deliberate misunderstandings, because they hated him. They knew full well he wouldn't destroy and rebuilt the temple-mount in three days. They knew from what they saw that they were in the presence of God himself. But they didn't care. So they used his own words against him, publicly, as if they were so holy, building themselves up, showing how full of truth they were, as they lied and then wagged their tongues in mockery and put him to death.

But in this psalm, the reversal is clear. *They* will go down to the pit. *Their* end will be food for jackals. *Their* mouths will be stopped. God will do it!

The War's Reversal

Psalms 64 shows this all quite clearly, and yet with perhaps a twist you may not be thinking about. It begins with the same verbal link that connects it to Psalm 61. “**Hear my voice, O God.**” These are meant to be read together. “**In my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy**” (1). It is so easy to fear. God must preserve us from that end.

“Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the throng of evildoers” (2). He knows they are plotting, but it is secret. He can't prove it. But he knows it. Their plots are generated by their evil words, and they do this in groups, not alone. They are a throng of evildoers. Evil thrives on bringing others into its net. The more the tongues wag, the more others want to join in. We love the curiosity, the gossip. This is another reason why it is easy to fear. Groups are after him.

“Who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows, shooting from ambush at the blameless, shooting at him suddenly and without fear” (3). Do you see the war now? Perhaps as we have moved along you have tended to think that this really isn't about words. But that's exactly what it is about. **The war of words.** Words that stab. Words that cut. Words that pierce. Words that are unexpected, out of nowhere. Words that wound. Words of poison. Words that kill.

“They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly, thinking, ‘Who can see them?’” (5). This is their plotting. Together. In groups. In the open. No one will know. No one will do anything about it. No one will care.

Sadly, they are often right, because **most people don't care** when there is a war of words that they know about or even suspect, so long as they are not on the receiving end of it.

“**They search out injustice, saying, ‘We have accomplished a diligent search.’ For the inward mind and heart of a man are deep**” (6). The point of this verse is that even if someone were to care, to search out the injustice, and to do something about it, those engaged in the war **hide traps** for them. They tell themselves that these traps cannot be seen or prevented, even if someone were to go looking.¹¹ He is so arrogant that he believes they won't look or they won't find, or they won't prove their wrongs.

But God knows. And God cares. And God sees. And God does not stay inactive.

“**But God shoots his arrow at them; they are wounded suddenly**” (7). Here comes the twist. **If the arrows are parallel** (see **vs. 3**), what is in mind here is his own word! The law cuts them. The gospel hardens them. Christ's life and death and resurrection puts them to shame. And eventually,

¹¹ Nancy deClaissé-Walford and Beth Tanner, “[Book Two of the Psalter: Psalms 42–72](#),” in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 525.

it kills them. This is a different way of thinking about it than simply God zapping them dead on the street. God has his own powerful arrows. God's weapon is the Word of God. *One little word shall fell them.*

“They are brought to ruin, with their own tongues turned against them; all who see them will wag their heads” (8). Remember that's what they did to Jesus. “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads” (Ps 22:7; cf. Matt 27:39). This is an eye for an eye. Justice. The favor is returned. They have become a stench and a curse as the Word lays bare what they are.

This is the power of God's word we are talking about here, not just in the future, but today. If the church were to actually recover the Word, what would it do to the wickedness that is all around us, wickedness that starts with ideas and words?

“Then all mankind fears; they tell what God has brought about and ponder what he has done” (9). I'm asking you to ponder not some kind of apocalyptic end of this war, but something simple. The power of the arrows of God's word that pierce and cut deep to the heart and change people,

families, churches, towns, civilizations. It has happened before. It happens still. It is happening now.

Do not fret the war of words. But be very careful that you are not engaging in it yourself. You see that God is a warrior who fights for those who are trampled on in this way. These kinds of wars disgust him, for they attack the very heart of who he is as a Triune God. The Father's Word is precious. The Father's Word brings life. The Father's Word died for your sins. To use words in these unholy ways is the very essence of blasphemy, because they strike at the heart of what the Word is.

Therefore, trust in the Word. Do not abuse it. Then, "Let the righteous one rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him! Let all the upright in heart exult!" (10). He will be your refuge and you will withstand any verbal attacks, no matter how fierce or destructive. For Christ withstood them, and was raised from the dead for it.