

Psalm 33

A Matter of National Security

Introduction: A Matter of National Security

My wife's mother died a number of years before I met Barbara. Barbara's mother's jewellery became her inheritance. When we were in Pakistan we left that jewellery with her dad thinking it would be safer here in Australia than in Pakistan. Unfortunately, my father-in-law's house was burgled and my wife lost her inheritance. The monetary value of the jewellery was unimportant. This inheritance was important to Barbara because of her love for her mother.

In this world people may lose inheritance. What about God's inheritance? The key verse of this psalm, verse 12, states: "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance.*" Psalm 33 is magnificently composed. There are 22 verses deliberately corresponding to the Hebrew alphabet indicating completeness of thought. There are exactly 161 words in this psalm in the Hebrew and the middle word, the 81st word is the word "Blessed". The most important thing that you and I need to know is that we are "blessed" by God. God's people are his nation and, especially in this context, they are a "blessed" nation because they are protected and greatly loved by the Lord their God. All that God has done in the history of the world and all that he is now doing is a matter of national security, that is, ensuring the security of God's nation, his chosen people. Why? Because we are God's inheritance and God will not let anyone lay their grubby hands on his inheritance.

1. The Threat to National Security

It is especially during times of international conflict and tension that governments take extreme action in the interests of national security. For God there has never been a time when his nation has not been under threat. The nature of this threat to national security is indicated in verse 10: "*The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.*"

In 1914 the Australian government had to act because the spread of venereal disease among Australian soldiers threatened their fighting fitness and so raised issues of national security. In 1941 under National Security Regulations (Aliens Control), a number of German, Italian and later Japanese residents throughout Australia were confined to Internment Camps in Western Australia. In 1950, during the Cold War and at the time of the Korean conflict, Prime Minister Robert Menzies appealed to the National Security Act when he banned the Australian Communist Party. In all of these cases the Australian government was concerned about the threat posed by a few nations. But look at verse 10 again: "*The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.*" Not just some nations and some peoples oppose God's government and seek to destroy his people. David speaks of "the plans of the nations" and "the purposes of the peoples." He recognises that the whole world is opposed to God and God's people. This is still the state of the world. Jesus said in John 15:19: "*If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*" Precisely because God chosen us to be his inheritance, the world hates us.

2. The Guarantee of National Security

But we are the "blessed." That means we are perfectly secure. We are the untouchables. Eat your heart out Eliot Ness because we are the true "Untouchables." Sure, people can kill us. But Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Matthew 10:28). It is impossible to snatch God's inheritance way from him. Have you realised how safe you are as a Christian? Again Jesus says, "*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one*" (John 10:28-29).

The opposition we face from the world is not haphazard. In verse 10 David speaks of "the plans of the nations" and "the purposes of the peoples." People come up with ways of thinking and acting aimed at making the Christian community a nonentity. Think of how people talk about tolerance. When we get serious about telling people that Jesus is the only way people get very upset with us. "You mustn't say this!" they protest. "How dare you say that Jesus is the only way! You need to learn to accept that other religions are just as valid. People are entitled to choose their own religion." It is highly hypocritical. Christians are the easy target. You'll never hear people publicly taking Muslims on in this way - they're too scared, as my oldest daughter has found this out in tutorial groups at university. Make no mistake about it. If the world had its way it would plan us out of existence.

But when David thought about the hostile plans of the nations against God and his people he said: "*The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.*" On one occasion the Taliban's religious and political leader, Mullah Omar, decreed that any Afghani embracing Christianity would be killed, and anyone selling Christian literature would be sentenced to five years in prison. Yet at that same time more Afghanis came to the Lord than ever before. The Taliban might be able to eradicate the memory of Buddhism from Afghanistan by blowing up all the statues, but God was foiling and thwarting their purpose to destroy the Christian church.

David insists: "*But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations*" (v11). All of God's plans and all of God's purposes centre around his one great plan: to choose and build a people for himself. History is the story of that plan.

3. God's Commitment to National Security

We know this is the plan because God has told us himself, in his word. The main section of this psalm is contained in verses 4 to 19 and David fittingly begins with God's revelation: "*For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love*" (vv4-5). The word of the Lord reveals something fundamental about God. It tells us "*he is faithful in all he does*" and when it tells us this it is "right and true", utterly dependable. To understand this psalm you must understand that when David says "he is faithful in all he does" he means God is faithful to his people in all he does. When he says, "The Lord loves righteousness and justice" he means God loves doing the right thing by his people; the Lord loves to honour his commitment to his people. When David says, "the earth is full of his unfailing love" he doesn't mean that God has shown his love for all people all over the world. That is true, of course, but that is not

David's point. What David means is that the whole earth is a theatre in which God shows his never-ending love for the people he has chosen to be his inheritance. God would have the entire world know how much he loves us.

But God's word does more than just inform us of these truths. It makes them real. You must never treat God's word as a passive, objective book which you simply pick up and read like any other book. To listen to God's word is not like listening to an audio tape. God never engages in idle talk. God doesn't prattle. He doesn't utter banalities. He doesn't talk small talk and just pass the time of day. When God speaks he speaks with a purpose. God speaks because he wants to accomplish a purpose and he accomplishes his purpose by speaking. We speak and sometimes it's just talk without action. We say things like "deeds speak louder than words." But God never simply speaks. Whenever God speaks he acts.

This is precisely the point David now makes: *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep in storehouses"* (vv6-7). Here David is describing the work of God in creation. What did God do? He created the heavens and all the heavenly host. He placed the chaos waters within limits. But how did he do this? Verses 6-9 beat the same drum. You will see that this section begins and ends with a similar statement. Look at verse 6: *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth."* Compare this with verse 9: *"For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm"*.

All ancient myths speak of the immense difficulty their gods had in creating the world. Not our God! He just utters a word and it is done! Ancient people thought of the heavens as the realm where all the gods are to be found and they thought of the oceans as the realm of the terrible gods of chaos. God does not have to wrestle and fight with other gods. He simply speaks, he simply breathes and the heavens jump to his command and the mighty oceans are set within their limits as easily as a small boy might pour water into a goat-skin jar or bottle or as easily as a person might put an item of food in a storehouse.

An elderly woman went to an early evening church service. The pastor preached on Acts 2:38: "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" Upon returning home she quietly entered her house, still thinking on Acts 2:38. Suddenly, she saw a strange man in the lounge with his back turned to her. He was in the act of robbing her home of its valuables. She yelled out, "Stop! Acts 2:38!"

The burglar stopped dead in his tracks. Then the woman calmly called the police and explained what she had done.

As the officer cuffed the man to take him in, he asked the burglar, "Why did you just stand there? All the old lady did was yell a scripture at you."

"Scripture?" replied the burglar, "She said she had an axe and two 38s!"

Psalms 33 is about how God uses his Word to control hostile forces. Ancient people associated the frightening oceans with hostile powers. No old lady can stop herself from being bashed up by a burglar by quoting Scripture at him. And after being burgled twice in one year while sleeping, we don't the senior pastor to defend himself and his family this way. So the church pays for security screens. But God really does

but speak his word and the heaving oceans are arrested in their tracks and flow according to his command. In the same way, and David deliberately draws this parallel, God's word ensures that the world's hostile plans are brought to nought.

Get David's point. God's word expresses his purpose to create a people for himself. God created the world for this very purpose. He created the most feared parts of creation by his word, the very same word which speaks of God's total commitment to his people. No wonder we have nothing to fear from the world. How can any group of people, no matter how mighty they might seem to us, stand against the power of God's word and turn aside God's eternal purpose. If God has overwhelming control over even the most feared parts of creation, as he does, then God himself must be an awesome person, a person to be feared. So David exhorts, *"Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him"* (v8).

4. National Security and Intelligence

In its concern for national security every government has an intelligence service. It has its spooks, its spies. If the secret service has its spies in the right places it can keep its eye on possible threats, such as potential terrorist attacks. Some nations depend on spy satellites to watch other countries. For God national security is assured because he has perfect intelligence without needing to use any spy or satellite. This is what David is explaining in verses 13-15: *"From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth - he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do"*.

During the Cold War a newspaper editor was correctly informed that the Americans had a bell listening device they had placed on Soviet cables which told them where all Soviet nuclear submarines were. The editor decided not to print this because of his concern for national security. God doesn't depend on listening devices and on hidden cameras and the goodwill of newspaper editors for gathering the intelligence he needs to ensure national security for his people. God doesn't need to wait till the satellite has moved into the right position before he can see what's happening on earth. He sees everything at all times. This means it is impossible to surprise God. It is impossible to catch him unawares. David is giving yet another reason why it is impossible for the nations and peoples of the world to undermine his plans. God formed the hearts of all people so he knows what they are planning to do at all times. No wonder David can place verse 12 at the centre of his psalm with such confidence: *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance"*.

5. National Insecurity

In reality it is not God's people who are under threat. It is the hostile people of the world who are under threat as God the judge looks down upon them and clearly sees their evil purpose. So now the psalm flips the other way. David has already explained why God's nation is perfectly secure. How about other nations? How secure are they? Verses 16-17 tell it all: *"No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save"*. Can even the strongest of the world's peoples - the kings and the warriors - escape the wrath of God? No way! The leaders of this world depend on weapons and military might to safeguard national security.

In a similar way people in their arrogance hope that their own strengths will save them. There is a story that Muhammad Ali was on a flight.

During the flight the aircraft ran into foul weather, and mild to moderate turbulence began to toss it about. All nervous fliers well know that when a pilot signals 'moderate turbulence,' he is implying, 'if you have any religious beliefs, it is time to start expressing them.' The passengers were accordingly instructed to fasten their seatbelts immediately. Everyone complied but Ali. Noticing this, the flight attendant approached him and requested that he observe the captain's order, only to hear Ali audaciously respond, 'Superman don't need no seatbelt.' The flight attendant did not miss a beat and replied, 'Superman don't need no airplane either.'

In a similar way people think their good deeds will save them. We tell them, "Your life is now on the line. You must put your trust in Jesus." In Muhammad Ali fashion people respond, "I don't need Jesus. God will still accept me. I have nothing to fear. I've been a good person." If Muhammad Ali doesn't need a seatbelt he doesn't need an aeroplane either. If you don't need Jesus then you don't need life because let me tell you straight: without Jesus you have no life and no future. Think this way and you are thinking like a mule. If a horse is a vain hope for deliverance then what chance have you?

6. Foundation of National Security

God's eyes are on the hostile peoples of the world to judge them. However, he looks at his own people in a very different way as David explains, "*But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine*" (vv18-19). God will save us because he is eternally committed to us in love. It is his the revelation of God in his word as the faithful God committed to loving his people which is the foundation of our faith and hope. Since David we have had an even richer and fuller revelation of God as love. As Paul tells us: "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom 5:8). If you are a Christian do not have any doubt about your eternal destiny and your security in Christ. In your mind and heart you have a camera. It is important for you to always keep the focus on one thing and one thing only. Everything else should be more blurry, should be in the background. The one thing you must keep in sharp focus is the faithful love of God, that is, the cross. We are called to be a cross-eyed people.