*just* words because, in uttering them she is protesting a terrible injustice. There is a tremendous difference between just *words* that are mean and hurtful (like spiteful nicknames), and *just* words that offend because they seek to right an injustice.

In Psalm 52, King David uses *just* words as he recalls the injustice of Doeg as recorded in 1 Samuel 21-22. Doeg, a shepherd, and a servant of King Saul informed the king that David sought refuge in the city of Nob, in the temple of God. Ahimelech, the priest, helped David by giving him food and shelter. Saul ordered Doeg to kill Ahimelech and all the priests, and to raise the city of Nob. So, Doeg did as Saul commanded: he murdered 85 unarmed priests, and put all the men, women, children, and livestock to death (1 Samuel 22:18-19). David felt personally responsible for this crime as it was his presence at the temple which endangered the priests. The condemnation of Doeg in Psalm 52 is strong, and rightly so, *justly* so considering the mass-murder committed. This psalm is David’s contemplation on that atrocity many years later; it is a careful examination of the root and end of Doeg’s evil.

David begins with Doeg’s sin and its punishment. David asks, “Why do you boast in evil, O mighty one?” He wonders why Doeg felt such joy in reporting David’s whereabouts to Saul or took such pleasure in killing innocent people. The term “O mighty one” is ironic: although Doeg is mighty in a physical sense, he is weak of mind and spirit to undertake such brutal acts. Perhaps a more accurate moniker might be, “O Thou Tyrant,” for Doeg is a man who abuses his power and does harm against the people he should protect. Remember, Doeg is a shepherd: his job is to protect the defenseless from harm. Yet, Doeg prefers to perpetrate mischief, to plot destruction, and to use his tongue like a sharp razor performing works of treachery (v. 2). Doeg loves evil more than good and lying more than the truth (v. 3).

David addresses Doeg’s wicked heart and mind. The destruction of these razor-sharp words was no accident or out of character. Doeg loved evil and he loved to lie. He loved the destruction his devouring words wrought on others. But Doeg’s way is doomed to fail, according to David, because God’s goodness will outlast Doeg’s evil. Doeg is a mighty man, but his might is nothing compared to God and God’s never-ending goodness.

“God will break you down forever,” David proclaims. Because the goodness of God endures continually, Doeg and his kind will be vanquished. God’s righteous anger against injustice will not allow this kind of destruction to rule the day. David uses four vivid images of God’s judgment against wicked people like Doeg. The wicked will be destroyed; God will break them forever. The wicked will be snatched up, like a coal withdrawn from a fire. The wicked will be torn from their tents, seized from their homes. The wicked will be uprooted from the land of the living. This last judgment is the most damning because, like a tree or a plant that is uprooted, it cannot continue to live and grow, and it cannot produce offspring. The wicked person who is uprooted is wholly removed from creation and their evil eliminated. The bad fruit which the wicked produce is eradicated so that it cannot produce more bad fruit.

The good, God-fearing people will see this judgment against Doeg, and they will hear God’s just words of condemnation against Doeg (v. 6). They will “fear” God, revering God as One who is righteous and afraid of provoking God to send like judgment upon them. The righteous will seek God’s ways instead. They will “laugh” at the destruction of such evil, satisfied in God’s actions and content that all is well. Curiously, it is the righteous who learn from Doeg’s judgment. We might wish for the wicked to learn their lesson, “but this is the tragedy of life,” says Alexander McLaren, “that its teachings are prized most by those who have already learned them, and that those who need them most consider them least.”

These same righteous ones will say of the wicked one, “See the one who would not take refuge in God, but trusted in abundant riches, and sought refuge in wealth!” (v. 7). To the list of Doeg’s sins, David now adds one more: a failure to trust God, putting his faith in great riches instead. Doeg slaughtered an entire community to gain Saul’s favor. Doeg perpetrated unimaginable evil for the sake of future gain. Interestingly, Saul never promised Doeg a reward for his service, but Doeg hoped to gain materially from the king. “Wealth and wickedness are dreadful companions,” wrote Charles Spurgeon, “when combined they make a monster.” Doeg and wicked people like him, are drawn to evil and lying because they fail to trust that God can and will work through goodness and truth.

Unfortunately, we are guilty of this, too. We lie to ourselves, saying that we *must* cut these corners, work this evil, or promote this lie because it is the only way to get things done. We are content to choose the lesser of two evils, rather than seek God’s goodness and truth. We may not annihilate entire villages like Doeg, but we can point to times when we compromised ourselves and our faith, doing what is expedient rather than what is right.

But for those who learn the lesson of Psalm 52, for those who put their faith in God and seek to do what is right in God’s sight, there is great consolation. David writes, “I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever” (v. 8). Here, David uses a metaphor drawn from his own context. The olive tree is one of the longest-lived trees. If David trusts God, David will live long and thrive. If David follows God’s ways, he will “live” within God’s “house,” that is, David will live in God’s favor.

David also trusts that God will ultimately triumph over evil. The world is still a fallen, inhospitable place where the wicked seek to gain over the powerless, but David is confident in God’s victory. “I will thank you forever, because of what you have done. In the presence of the faithful I will proclaim your name, for it is good” (v. 9). The Doeg’s of the world are still out there, doing bad things, but their way is doomed. God’s goodness and truth will prevail. David is sure of this, which is why he praises God for what God has done. The past tense of the verb implies completion. God rescued David from Saul’s wrath. God lifted David to the heights of power. God did not abandon David when he stumbled. God made promises to David that God fulfilled.

We know this to be true because God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne of Israel forever. God fulfilled this promise when God came to us in Jesus Christ. David did not know Jesus, he lived 1,000 years before Jesus; but David knew enough about God to proclaim God’s name, for it is good. God who promises is faithful.

Psalm 52 is a psalm of imprecation, a curse against those who promote evil. These are *just* words, on behalf of a *just* God who cannot abide injustice and will not let it stand. There are times when *just* words must be spoken.

Prayer: God, I do not want to brag about the evil I’ve done. I want to bask in your faithful, long-lasting love. Give me the courage to have your kind of power, the power to persuade, the power to convince, the power to draw others to me so they can know your love. May the words I use not be destructive. May they not cut others. May they be honest. May I focus my entire life on good and not evil. No matter what, may I never lie and deceive others. Make me like a thriving olive tree in your house, healthy and full of fruit. May I trust in in your faithful love forever and always. Make that trust real in my words and my actions. I thank you because you have acted and not left me alone to continue down the path of destruction and deceit. Please surround me with people that are faithful to your loving way. In them, I will see the reason for hope in your good name. AMEN.

Source: David Guzik. The Enduring Word Commentary. “Psalm 52 – Praying About the Man Who Loved Evil.” © 2020. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-52/>

**Just Words**

Sunday, July 17, 2022 Psalm 52

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Finish this phrase: “Sticks and stones may break my bones…but words will never hurt me.” Many of us learned that simple rhyme as children. But here’s the problem with that so-called wisdom: it’s not true! It’s complete horse feathers! Words can hurt us and deeply wound us. I remember being called “four eyes” because I wore glasses. Kids called me a “geek” because I was passionate about music and a “dork” because I struggled with social expectations and interactions. In truth, derogatory nicknames are just words, but those words prey on our deepest insecurities. Developing a thick skin against such attacks is an important life skill.

Some harsh words really are just *words* and are easily brushed aside. Other words are *just* words which speak a truth that addresses injustice. In William Shakespeare’s *Richard III,* Lady Anne views the corpse of King Henry VI and says of his murderer, Gloucester:

*“O! cursed be the hand that made these holes;*

*Cursed be the heart that had the heart to do it!*

*Cursed the blood that let this blood from hence!*

*More direful hap betide that hated wretch,*

*That makes us wretched by the death of thee,*

*Than I can wish to adders, spiders, toads,*

*Or any creeping venom’d thing that lives!*

*If ever he have child, abortive be it,*

*Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,*

*Whose ugly and unnatural aspect*

*May fright the hopeful mother at the view;*

*And that be heir to his unhappiness!*

*If ever he have wife, let her be made*

*More miserable by the death of him*

*Than I am made by my young lord and thee!”* (*Richard III*, 1.2.16-30)

Lady Anne wishes for Gloucester to have ugly, deformed children and a wife who is bereft at his death. She wishes worse for Gloucester than anything she would wish on snakes, spiders, toads, and “creepy venomed things.” Lady Anne’s word are harsh, an example of