

All right. Let open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 64 as we continue our study through the Psalms.

This Psalm has no real introduction and there is really no way that we can know for sure at what point of David's life this was written. Most commentators believe that it was probably penned during the time that when David's son Absalom had organized a smear campaign against his father. David was out of the limelight. He was living actually in sin. And he was able to organize an overthrow of his dad's government, or at least an attempted coup that cost him eventually his life, but that broke David's heart.

What we can be sure of is that this is a Psalm that is short but is singular, and it only points point in one direction. David wants to talk about gossip; the poisonous tongues of men directed at him to damage him in this case, to inflict hurt through words that are spoken in secret from afar, and how he handles them and allows the Lord to minister through them. We have called this morning's message "A Smear Campaign."

I am convinced, and maybe you are as well, that the single greatest sin tolerated in the church is gossip. You'll find it everywhere. You'll find it amongst pastors and elders and board members and ushers and Sunday school workers. And we don't have any problem putting up with it. We just participate. It is just something we do. We can cloak it in terms of godliness - - oh, you know, I just want to share with you so you can pray. We've also hear so you can pray and you get the better gist of it, if you will. But it is an issue that finds itself tolerated in the church. There's a lot of things we don't tolerate. Oh, that's sinful. This we embrace and we allow it to continue. And yet if you go to Proverbs Chapter 6, it is listed as one of seven things that God hates.

Now, I don't know about you, but when God says I hate

this, you should be saying I hate it too. I hate this. And He does. One who sows discord amongst the brethren. And I think it is because our greatest witness to the world is His love in our lives. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love, one for another." So if the enemy can turn you against each other, if he can take away your love, he takes away your witness.

Which is why the Bible is so filled with, in the annals of scripture, warnings about this one issue. I honestly could stand up here for the next hour and just read them to you, there's that many. And maybe there are that many because we're slow to learn or we don't believe it, but evil speech and backbiting and slander whispered in the ears of others are Bible topics that the Lord says to us don't participate in, get away from, seek to overcome, walk in the light, resist the devil, the father of lies. It's his greatest weapon against the church, but it is not a warfare that most of us are willing to engage. It's just the way things are. We used to have a saying in the church: Telephone, telegraph, tell the church. If you really want to keep a secret, just tell one person and not tell anyone, and it'll get down to everyone. It's just the way it works.

Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians in Chapter 4, just so that you know it's not a new problem, says to them in verse 29, "Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouth, but only speak those words that will edify or build up, so that you might impart grace to the hearers. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit with promise about whom you've been sealed to the day of redemption, but put away all bitterness, anger, wrath, clamor, evil speaking, put them away from you, with all malice. Instead be kindhearted to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as Christ has also forgiven you."

Peter picks up that same sentiment in 1 Peter Chapter 4 and he said, "If you suffer for the name of Jesus or are reproached, happy are you, but don't you make -- make sure you don't suffer as a murderer or as a thief or as an evildoer or as someone who is a busybody in someone else's affairs. If judgment begins at the house of God, how are those who don't know the Lord going to survive?"

Paul wrote to the Hebrew church, Chapter 12, as he got done with his doctrinal statements, and he said, "Be

careful, lest any of you should fall short of the grace of God; and that there would spring up in you a root of bitterness which will trouble you, and defile many around you."

And that's where David finds himself this morning. So critical is the warfare with gossip and evil speaking, so prevalent is it in the devil's arsenal, that you participating in it are not a tool of God. You become a tool of the enemy. Remember that the next time you open your mouth to talk about somebody else. God hates it.

Well, here's David's appeal to the Lord. And we're not sure, like I said, the background, but we're sure of the subject. "Hear my voice, O God, in my meditation; and preserve my life from fear of the enemy." Fear can certainly be debilitating. David prays that God might keep him from it, especially in this area of slander and evil speech, which is being directed at him by his enemies. David worried about the effect of that malice upon his oversight. David never feared a fair fight. In fact, if you read through the scriptures, you'll never see him turning away from battle. The Lord will even say of David, "You're a man that has shed blood. You're a warrior." But this is not a fair fight. This is sinful man who loves to believe the worst, repeating a lie. And David said, "Lord, preserve me from fearing what others might say about me." In fact, he doesn't use the word "fear," although that's what's written here. The word is "dread." I think the New American Standard has it right. It says dread. Dread is more than fear. It's the kind of fear that overwhelms or cripples or even paralyzes you.

David was not afraid of confrontation directly, but he was certainly concerned about the secret plots of the wicked and the rebellion of the workers of iniquity. David was the hidden target, if you will, or the target of their hidden plots. Hide me from their conspiracy. David was powerless to stop them.

Just think about how gossip works. You're being shot at from the shade while you stand in the light. You can't see the enemy, but they can see you. You can't defend yourself, you don't know where it's coming from, and it'll hit you where you least expect it, and when you're not looking. It's not exactly a level playing field. And so remember, God hates it. And the enemy uses it and

David said Lord, preserve me from the dread of that.

And secondly, verse 2, hide me. "Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, those who are rebellious workers of iniquity." David felt powerless to stop them, so he brings his case to the Lord. He describes their behavior this way: "Who sharpen their tongues like a sword, who bend their bows to shoot their arrows, which are bitter words. They shoot them in secret at the blameless suddenly. They shoot at them and they're not afraid."

Look at the poetic way in which -- well, this is a book of poetry, so you would expect it to be, poetic and picturesque, but it certainly is sharp and to the point. Secret plots, rebellion, sharpening their tongues like a sword, arrows of bitter words shot in secret at the blameless, believing no one will see them, and shooting without fear or fear of reprisal or any accountability. That's how it works. It works in the shadows.

It doesn't take much courage to shoot an arrow in secret from afar, and it is extremely difficult to defend. To spread lies or rumors about another is sin. And it's cruel. And it's cowardly. And as such, it perfectly resembles Satan, the father of lies. He's the founder. He's the one who developed it. David calls them secret plots. Bitter words that lay in ambush for an innocent man. And they act from the shelter of anonymity, and that's the way gossip always works. A rumor has to be launched without fear only when you can pass it along and say, well, I heard what somebody said. Well, who is that somebody? I don't know. That's what I heard. I'm just passing it along, because that's what I do. I'm not sure who said it, I just know that I heard it.

Here's what Spurgeon wrote on verse 3 in his diary: "An open liar is an angel compared to this demon. The devil himself would blush at being the father of such offspring." That's pretty tough. But I agree. Cowards seeking to dress as angels of light.

Notice it says in verse 4, "They shoot in secret at the blameless, and they do it suddenly without expectation, without warning, and they do it without fear." Gossip requires a hidden place. Evil speaking requires a hiding place. The people who engage in it are not afraid of what would come to them as a result. They certainly aren't afraid of the things of God. They're in a hidden

place. They are snipers in the bushes to take down a target from afar, unable to defend themselves against this ambush.

It's interesting to me that a person that would never think about robbing a bank will have no problem trying to destroy a character, or speak about someone's background, or their lack or their weakness. David wasn't speaking about actual arrows. He was speaking about the anonymous shooting of bitter words from people who didn't have the courage to look you in the eye.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians -- and if you ever wanted to find a church that was hard on Paul, go no further than the Corinthian letters. Just go read them. He is under attack by these guys constantly. It's not a good church, it's not a very healthy church, it wasn't a very strong church; but it was an angry church. And Paul said to them in II Corinthians Chapter 4 that he had renounced all of those hidden things and tried to live not craftily or handling the world deceitfully. He just wanted to manifest the truth in his life by clear conscience in the sight of God. I just want to do the best I can. I don't want to do it in the shadows. I want to live out where people can see me.

When Paul ran into that whole issue with Peter, you know, worried about what the Judaizers might say when he was eating with the gentiles there in Galatia and then moved to the Jewish table when the Jews showed up, and Paul wrote, man, even Barnabas kind of got stumbled by Peter's, you lack of commitment to one way or the other. You read in Galatians Chapter 2, verse 11, that he says when Peter came to Antioch, "I withstood him to his face." That's not gossip, that's fellowship. That's relationship. That helps. And he was willing to look Peter in the eye and say, "Peter, what you're doing is wrong. This shouldn't be this way."

But the gossipers and those that were shooting the arrows at David are people whose lives are lived under rocks. It's hidden sin. Call it godly if you will, but there's secrets and it's concealment, and it shouldn't be so. Paul wrote to the Ephesians in Chapter 5, verse 11, "Have no fellowship with those under fruitful works of darkness, rather expose them. It is a shame to speak of the things that are done by them in secret." He said to Timothy, "These are folks who have a form of godliness

but they deny His power. Of such, turn away."

And David was the focus. And so he prays to not be dreading the battles that he can't fight. He realizes what he's up against and who the people are that are shooting at him, if you will, and seeking to destroy. He says of them in verse 5, "They encourage themselves in an evil matter; they talk of laying snares secretly; and they say, 'Who will see them?' And so they devise iniquities: They have perfected, they say, a shrewd scheme. While both the inward thought and the heart of man is deep." David realizes that those who are motivated towards this smear campaign are operating from a real depth of sin in the core of their being. They have a bottomless pit of evil words.

And notice that the suggestion is, it's more than one person. It is a group who gathered together with like-mindedness to do the like-minded thing; to agree together, to encourage one another. Who's going to know? Who's going to know? We'll just put it out there and see what happens. They were out to discredit David. They didn't think they were accountable to anyone. They had this confident question. They encouraged themselves. They say to one another, that's a great idea. That's a shrewd scheme. We can do the evil. Now, they know they're doing it, but they're proud of themselves and pretty sure they're going to get away with it. They'll just deny it if it comes back to light. Hey, it wasn't me. I didn't say it.

I love verse 7, because whenever David in the Psalms -- and for that matter in the scriptures. Whenever the writers, they lay out a problem, at some point they have to turn to the Lord for solution. So here's the issue, here's the enemy, here's the suffering, but. And there's always that word "but." When you get to the word "but" in the Bible, it's usually a good term; right? It's the hinge upon which the poetic justice of God comes. But, verse 7, "God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they'll be wounded. And He will cause them to stumble over their own tongues; and all who see them shall flee away."

Ahithophel, who was a man at the time of the rebellion against David, who changed sides. He started to give counsel for the opposition. He ended up being caught in his own words and ended up taking his own life in

despair. Absalom, David's son, who led the revolt, ended up being killed in the battle that followed, to David's chagrin. It broke his heart. But both of these men, bound and determined to slander David, ended up in very difficult places by the hand of God, not at the hand of David. David would have liked it if it turned out something else than the way that it did. But the word "but." But. And David realized that the people he was opposed to and the ones who shot their arrows, were those who were standing against the will of God, but here's David's defense: But God will shoot an arrow.

You see, the interesting thing about gossipers is they think they have all the ammunition. What they forget is God is well-armed. In fact, He only needs one arrow. It's a singular word. And He has the high ground. If you're in a battle, it's better to have the high ground. He has the extreme high ground.

So they had David in their sights; God had them in His. And while the evil plotted and took comfort in their evil associations, and in their shrewd, I should say, plans, they were only going to feel comfortable until God unexpectedly moved. I like the fact that there's only one verse that describes God's reaction, or two, at best. The brevity of God's countermeasures and the elaborate scheming of the wicked would tell you who's going to win this battle. The Lord will. He will make them, verse 8, stumble over their own tongues. Their lies and their slanders that they heaped upon David to hopefully move him out of the way, God would use in a way to trap them with their own words. And when everyone else saw it, there would no longer be this gang of people, proud of their accomplishments. They would all run. No one would want to be associated now, because the God that David served had turned against them. Instead, verse 9, "All men will fear, and they'll begin to speak about the work of God; and they shall wisely consider His doing. And the righteous will be glad in the Lord, they'll trust in Him. And the upright in heart will glory in the fact that God will bring deliverance." God's dealing will make men fear, declare the Lord's word; not the wickedness and all. Remember in verse 5, the wicked said, who will see us? And the Lord's answer at the end of the chapter is, well, everyone is going to see you. You're going to be made out for what you are and who you are. And everyone is going to run from you to your own demise.

There's a verse in Isaiah 26, I think it's verse 9, which says, "When the judgments of God are upon the earth, the righteous will -- or the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness," and so it is. I think there is nothing better to look forward to than the sudden demonstration of the power of God to straighten up your life. Remember they said back in verse 4, they're going to shoot suddenly without fear, and verse 7 says, yeah, God's going to shoot suddenly as well, and His damage is going to be far greater in your life than you ever hope to inflict upon others.

If you go back to the book of Leviticus, when Aaron's sons at the commencement of the sacrifice decided to burn strange fire, Nadab and Abihu, when the fire jumped out of the altar and consumed them, there was very little rebellion for a while. In the early church, when Ananias and Sapphira sought to draw glory to themselves, away from God, and God let them drop dead as they walked out the church doors, there was little rebellion for a while; right? It says no one even dared joined themselves to the apostles. There was no hypocrisy for a time when God stepped in to intervene. God always steps in to intervene; you just have to wait upon Him. So those that had been bold in their blasphemous words and in their troubled speech now stand in awe of a Righteous Judge. Because when all is said and done, the Lord is still going to rule, and they're still going to bow.

There's a promise in Psalm 26 -- no, no, no, it's not Psalms. It's Proverbs 26. But it speaks about gossip and how it has little effect upon those who are seeking to walk with God. And again, poetry; right? So it says this: "Like a flittering sparrow," or a sparrow that's flapping its wings, or "like a flying swallow, so will a curse without cause never alight," or never land, or never have much impact. It just kind of is out there. It makes a lot of noise, but it doesn't accomplish much. So David prays, I don't want to be afraid. May you cause the wicked's words to come to naught. The poisonous tongues of men. God speaks and He'll have the last word.

Here's what Solomon wrote in Proverbs Chapter 6, verse 12, "A worthless person, a wicked man, one who walks with a perverse mouth; winks with his eyes, shuffles with his feet, points with his fingers; has perversity in his heart, devises wicked continually, and sows discord.

Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; that calamity will be broken and it will come without remedy." Such an interesting description from Solomon about a man who knows how to handle a life among others. I'm going to wink, I'm going to nod, I'm going to grin, I'm going to gesture, I'm going to make a deal, I'm going to live the life that people can relate to, but then his heart and his motives come crashing down. He's preoccupied with evil, with sowing discords, but one day, unexpectedly and without remedy, God will deal with the situation.

After those verses I just read to you out of Proverbs Chapter 6 comes these words: "Six things does God hate, seven are an abomination to Him." And the list isn't long, but they are certainly on target. These are things that God hates. And you may not be able to tell He hates them because He's so patient. And because He's patient, we settle in. Well, if He hated it, He'd do something about it. Well, you can work that out that quick.

First on the list, proud look. Literally translated from Hebrew, a look down your nose. Being prideful. Second of all, a lying tongue. Satan, the father of lies, John 8, I think, 44. The Lord loves the truth. Hands that shed innocent blood. How much is that in the news, even this week? A wicked heart. Description of men's hearts in the days of Noah constantly. Feet that are swift to run to mischief or hastening to do the wrong thing. I can't wait to do the wrong thing. A false witness. Those are the guys that showed up to get Jesus killed. Oh, here come the false witnesses, liars. And finally, those who sow discord among the brethren. One who divides the kingdom of God and its brethren as a work of the enemy. And it is not a work of God.

If you look at Jesus, He brought people together. Peter and John were not exactly a good pairing. One was a doer, the other was a dreamer. Matthew was a tax collector. Simon, the Zealot, he protested against tax. He went to jail to not pay it. These guys hated each other until Jesus got involved. Satan likes to pit people against one another. Jesus seeks to bring unity in the spirit. Because love is the ultimate witness, and gossip and evil speech the ultimate destroyer of witness and ministry. That's why God hates it.

If you go to -- if you were with us on the days that we were going through Nehemiah, there are a couple of

Chapters, Chapter 4 and 5, where, the enemy is seeking everything he can do to stop the work of God in putting this wall around the city of Jerusalem to protect the people. And he had tried everything from without and their attacks, and yet the work seemed to go on almost unhindered, but then the attacks came within. The carrying of lies from the enemy into the camp by those who lived closest to them, the abuse of power from the rich who were oppressing the poor, and the wealthy of that day not acting in godly manner, and the walls of protection that were being built almost came to a halt. It shows us significantly in these Chapters that God wanted to deliver them in love, and yet they almost were overthrown.

If you go to Joshua Chapter 22 -- again if you were with us on Wednesday night going through Joshua, there came a time when after the children of Israel had conquered the land, at least significantly so, that the Lord after seven and a half years, said that -- it was just a mop up deal now. You take your area and clean up. Well, there were two and a half tribes who had asked early on to have land on the other side of the Jordan, really outside the land of promise, but that's another issue. And they were told by Moses at the time, well, you can go and have that land, but first you come and fight with your brethren until all the land is subjected to them. And they had, and they'd been faithful and they'd worked hard and they'd served well. So they left, two and a half tribes -- thank you, bless you, Godspeed, off they went. As they got towards the border of the Jordan, where they were going to cross over, they decided to build a memorial. They really built it looking into the land to say the Lord has been faithful to deliver us and bring us. It was a pure-hearted attempt to honor the Lord, even though it wasn't necessarily sanctioned by the Lord, but that's what they wanted to do. Except word gets back to the other nine and a half tribes, those guys that are leaving, they decided to build their own temple, and they're going to start worshipping God a different way, and they're not going to be with us. In fact, there's a quote in Joshua 22, verse 11, and this is what it says: "Now, the children of Israel heard somebody say." That's all they knew. Who said it? Oh, I don't know, I just heard it. You can imagine that story running through 2 million people, that old telephone game. This has got to be horrible. By the time it was told for the 200th time, man, the whole country was going to war. In fact, they

all mounted up to go to war to kill two and a half tribes for their rebellion. Fortunately, Joshua was a wise guy. Sent some emissaries, went to find out what was going on, found it was just a big misunderstanding. All right. Never mind then. We won't kill them. But they got close to war out of gossip and this carrying forward, well, we heard somebody say.

No wonder James would write that no spring will bring forth salt water and fresh water. Be careful of your mouth and your tongue. Don't let envy and self-righteousness be in your heart. Don't boast and lie against the truth. He warns us. Small tongue, big damage. It destroys people and relationships, and you can get sucked into it because it's a sin that we just readily want to accept. Somebody said. You can go back to the law, Leviticus Chapter 19, where you'll read these words: "Don't go away as a talebearer among the people; don't take your stand against your neighbor; I am the Lord." In other words, this was an issue back then too. It's not a new problem.

There's a temptation in the church to gossip. It is a ploy of the enemy. Don't participate in the national pastime of talebearing. II Thessalonians Chapter 3, "We hear that some of you walk in a disorderly manner, not working at all, just being busybodies." It says three verses later, same chapter, "If anyone is not obeying the words of the epistle, note that person. Don't have any company with them, but do so as separate so that they'll be ashamed. Don't treat him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

It is a battle that we are in, whether you like it or not. It is one that you should refuse to participate in. And I think we could put the smear campaign to bed if we would take it all responsibly ourselves to not participate. Here's my suggestion to you: Vow to the Lord that you will never speak to someone else about another person. If there's an issue, talk to them, not about them. Go talk to them. That's the right way to do it. That's how relationship is, even when they're difficult. But it is cowardly to hide in the shadows and shoot your arrows.

A couple of years ago, when we were going through the Leviticus portion, I found -- I think I found, but I couldn't tell you where I found it, but I liked it, a

list of five things to do when people come to you with information about somebody else; when they want to use your ears as trash cans to spew in; when they want to engage you in the spiritual actions of gossip, backbiting and evil speaking. Five questions you might ask them. I'll give them to you, you can write them down. Number 1, why are you telling me this? That's usually a great opening act. Secondly, where did you get your information? I want sources. I want names. Who's telling you this? Third of all, third question, have you personally gone to them to voice your concerns? You see, the difference between getting information and gossip is usually the level of your voice. If you're whispering, it's probably not news. Where did you get your information, two. Number 3, have you gone personally to them to voice your concerns? Number 4, have you checked out all the facts? Because people haven't. They just hear something. They half hear it and they tell it. They can't wait to pass it along. The last one, helpful, may I quote you on that? That usually puts an end to it. All right. So I can tell them that you said -- oh, no, no, no, no. I didn't know it was going to be said, I just heard. Yeah. God hates it. Remind yourself again. God hates it.

Stomp out smear campaigns, because God would rather use you and your mouth to bless, to encourage, to keep the enemy at bay. But if you're not willing to be that person, to separate yourself from the backbiters and the liars and the evil speakers who have nothing better to do than say something wrong about somebody else, if you're not willing to separate yourself, you're going to be a tool in the hands of the devil, and that's just the way it works. So you're going to be somebody's tool. Your good news is you can choose whose.