

**Introduction: A David Psalm***A Psalm of David*

Psalm 141 is closely related to Psalm 140, which precedes it.

Psalm 140 draws us out of the trap and shows us the One who protects us, guards us, and delivers us from the snares of evil men.

Psalm 141 does something very similar!  
And it is also:

*A Psalm of David.*

This could mean that it was written by David,  
or it could mean that it was written about David.

Either way, it is a “A Psalm of David” –  
since the preposition could mean “by David,” “for David,” “about David” –  
the point is that this is a *Davidic Psalm* –  
you need to hear it and sing it with the first person singular  
being the voice of *David* –  
and thus, the voice of Jesus Christ!

And therefore, all who have been united to him by faith,  
can sing this song in and with him.

**1. My Prayer for Myself (v1-5a)****a. The Evening Sacrifice: My Prayer Ascending as Incense (v1-2)***O LORD, I call upon you; hasten to me!**Give ear to my voice when I call to you!*

Psalm 141 opens with a familiar phrase:

"O LORD, I call upon you; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to you!"

So many Psalms speak in this way to God:

"Hurry up, God! Don't ignore me! Listen! I'm in trouble!"

One of our favorites is Psalm 70 –

“Make haste O God to save me!”

One of the desert fathers referred to this as the Christian's basic prayer for every situation  
"Make haste, O God, to save me."

When I've had a hard day – and I'm feeling discouraged:

"Make haste, O God, to save me!"

When I'm tempted to sin – and turn away from God –

"Make haste, O God, to save me!"

When I've had a *good day* – and I'm tempted to feel like I don't need God!

"Make haste, O God, to save me!"

And even when I am closer to God than ever before, basking in his love –

"Make haste, O God, to save me!"

I have yet to find a situation where this prayer was out of place!

Think of a little child calling for his mother. The whole world is coming to an end –  
because Mom isn't coming quickly enough!

Psalm 141 suggests that when our hearts properly oriented  
we are still like that little child who thinks that the world is ending  
because his mother doesn't hear him!

After all, we smile at the child -- because *we know* that things are really under control.

Mom hears him -- everything is fine -- she just has to go to the bathroom!

In other words, she is doing something necessary for the good of humanity –  
and while it has nothing in particular to do with the child,  
the child needs to learn

that God does not always run immediately to rescue us –  
precisely because *he knows* better than we do,

and he is working *all things* together for good

for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

Psalm 141 teaches us that God *wants us* to be like that with him!

He *wants us* to say, "hurry up God!! You're taking too long!"

2 Peter 3:12 speaks of how we are to be waiting for *and hastening* the coming day of God.  
How can we *hasten* the day of his coming?

By praying, "Make haste, O God, to save me!"

Hurry up, God, and do what you have promised!

Of course, notice the *attitude* behind this prayer!

There is a tone of confidence and trust.

This is not whining!

We should not come to God with a whiny attitude!

We should not say, “O God, when will you get around to doing what I want...!”

The right attitude is found in verse two:

<sup>2</sup>*Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,  
and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!*

Think about what this means!

Revelation 6 showed us the prayers of the saints ascending as incense before the Lord.

The Psalmist here asks that his prayers be "counted as incense" –  
in other words, my prayers are connected to the liturgy of the temple.  
The lifting up of my hands is connected to the evening sacrifice.  
When I pray I am acknowledging that I am *not* the center of the universe.  
I'm not even the center of the earth.  
The center of the earth is the temple -- in the Psalmist's day:  
where the incense is offered before God –  
where the evening sacrifice is offered night after night.

The word used here for the evening “sacrifice”  
is the word generally used for the grain offering.  
It means a “gift” (though it is often used euphemistically for tribute demanded by a king!)  
“Bring me a gift!!”

And for us, since Christ is the once-for-all sacrifice,  
the lifting up of my hands in prayer  
becomes the place where I am identified with Jesus.  
Jesus is the one who intercedes for us with the Father –  
and when *we* pray, we are joined to his sacrifice.

Paul speaks in terms of offering our bodies as living sacrifices to God –  
as gifts devoted to his service!

The word for “sacrifice” in Hebrew means “something brought near” –  
and while Augustine may not have known Hebrew,  
he knew the Bible well enough to see the connection.

In the City of God (book 10) Augustine says:

“Thus a true sacrifice is every work which is done  
that we may be united to God in holy fellowship,  
and which has a reference to that supreme good and end  
in which alone we can be truly blessed....  
Since, therefore, true sacrifices are works of mercy to ourselves or others,  
done with a reference to God,

and since works of mercy have no other object than the relief of distress  
or the conferring of happiness,  
and since there is no happiness apart from that good of which it is said,  
'It is good for me to be very near to God,'  
it follows that the whole redeemed city,  
that is to say, the congregation or community of the saints,  
is offered to God as our sacrifice through the great High Priest,  
who offered Himself to God in His passion for us,  
that we might be members of this glorious head,  
according to the form of a servant."

So perhaps now we are in a better vantage point to see what it means to say,  
"hasten to me" – make haste, O God, to save me!

Make haste – as I come night by night before you –  
Hurry up! – as I offer myself as a gift to you!  
Listen – because I'm not going anywhere!

You are the one that I need – so I'm not going anywhere  
until you answer!

I keep thinking about the stories that aren't in the Bible.  
The generations *in between* the famous ones.

What was it like to live in Egypt *before* Moses showed up?  
What was it like to live for decades – centuries – generation after generation  
waiting for God to save them?

What was it like after the book of Malachi –  
waiting for God to do what he had promised?!

My hunch is that it was a lot like it is now –  
after all, we are living "in between" the famous stories of the Bible.  
There is nothing all that important going on today!  
And we are called to that same *ordinary* faithfulness.

Our regular *ordinary* evening prayer –  
where we come to God with the evening sacrifice –  
offering our prayers as incense before God –  
trusting that he will hear – he will act – he will do all his holy will!

And with that in mind,  
the Psalmist turns to ask God to set a guard over his mouth and heart! (v3-4)

**b. Guard My Mouth and My Heart from Joining with the Wicked (v3-4)**

<sup>3</sup> *Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;  
keep watch over the door of my lips!*

What does this mean?

Well, Psalm 140 just used these same words “guard” and “keep watch” –  
to ask God to protect me from *others*.  
But here the Psalmist asks God to protect me from myself!!

If you know your own heart,  
then you know how easy it is for your mouth to get you in trouble!

We need God “to do something to turn us into people who want to use speech  
for the furtherance of truth and faithfulness, not of our interests.” (Goldingay, 656)

Lord, help me to speak wisely and truly!  
And even more – may *you* restrain my lips!

Who can tame the tongue?  
Only the one who made it!

And further, verse four digs down into the heart:

<sup>4</sup> *Do not let my heart incline to any evil,  
to busy myself with wicked deeds  
in company with men who work iniquity,  
and let me not eat of their delicacies!*

After all – it is out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks!  
If my heart is inclined to evil – then it is just a matter of time before it comes out!

And if my heart is inclined in that direction –  
then I will tend to join in with those who work iniquity.

If my heart is going the wrong direction,  
then I will be inclined toward the wrong company.

Think of Psalm 1 –  
Blessed is the man who walks not in the way of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of the scoffers.

There is a pattern:  
first I walk in the way – I walk in the path –

I'm heading in the direction of the wicked.  
But now that I've moved into their world,  
I start to feel more comfortable.  
I'm here to hang out!  
I move from walking down a path,  
to standing in the way of sinners.  
And before you know it – I'm not just standing around.  
I'm sitting in the seat of scoffers.  
In other words, now *I'm the one* calling others to join in!

Such is the “company” of men who work iniquity.

What company do you keep?  
Who are the people that you *want* to be around?

The contrast between verses 4 and 5 could not be starker!  
At the end of verse 4, “let me not eat of their delicacies” –  
the image is of a banquet – a dessert –  
a feast!

And in contrast in verse 5, we see a man beating me up!  
Which one do you want?

**c. And Send a Righteous Man to Strike Me! (v5a)**

<sup>5</sup> *Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness;  
let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head;  
let my head not refuse it.*

Which would you prefer?  
A banquet with the wicked?  
Or the beating from the righteous?!

The Psalmist is very clear:  
Give me a beating any day!

I used to think that this was a difficult decision.  
(Partly because I didn't like to be told I was wrong!)  
But God has been merciful,  
and now I think it's a no-brainer.

Seriously, I love a good rebuke.  
And when it comes from a righteous man – it is a ‘oil for my head’ –  
it is a kindness – it is *hesed* – steadfast love.

Rebuke a wise man – and he will love you!

I had a neighbor rebuke me this summer.

I had hired him to do some odd jobs around the place.

There was a misunderstanding, and he and I had a bit of a disagreement  
about how much he was owed.

At first he was just yelling at me –

but I wanted to understand why he was upset.

So I asked him to explain.

As I listened, I realized that the misunderstanding *was* actually my fault.

(At least in his mind).

As I thought about it, I realized that I needed to go to him and confess my fault –  
and give him the disputed \$10.

He was surprised to see me at his door.

Indeed, two days later, he wound up at *my door* –

asking my forgiveness for how *he had behaved*.

So, my prayer for myself is that God would protect me from myself.

That he would guard my mouth and my heart –

and that he would keep me from the company of the wicked.

And instead, that he would send a righteous man to rebuke me (when I need it!).

Part two then turns to “my prayer...against their evil deeds.”

## **2. My Prayer Against Their Evil Deeds (v5b-10)**

*Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds.*

I never cease praying against the evil deeds of those who work iniquity!

When you pray, “Thy kingdom come” –

then you are praying for the destruction of the kingdom of Satan!

When you pray, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus” –

then you are praying for Jesus to come and judge the living and the dead.

Verse 6 says this in a most poignant way!

### **a. Their Time Will Come (v6)**

<sup>6</sup> *When their judges are thrown over the cliff,<sup>[a]</sup>*

*then they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant.*

At the end of Psalm 140, the Psalmist asked God to make a decision for the poor.

Now, in verse 6 of Psalm 141, the same word is used of “their judges” –  
their “deciders” – the leaders of the wicked.

And their judges will be “thrown over the cliff” –  
a phrase that is closely related to the end of Psalm 137 –  
“happy is the one who dashes their children’s heads against the rock.”  
The word for “cliff” is the same word translated “rock” in Psalm 137.

But after being thrown over the cliff (or falling on the rock)  
“then they shall hear my words...”

This is not particularly surprising for the OT.  
After hearing a strong statement of judgment – and likely death –  
(being dashed against a rock is usually an image of death!),  
the Psalmist indicates that “they” will then hear “my words,  
for they are pleasant.”

It’s not too late to repent!  
You may be almost dead.  
But mostly dead is not quite dead!

And so now the words of the Psalmist bring life to the dead!

Consider, after all, what Jesus said!

John 5<sup>25</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup> For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup> And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Jesus speaks life-giving words – even to the dead!  
Even to *you* who were dead in your trespasses and sins!

**b. And Our Time Will Come (v7)**

<sup>7</sup> *As when one plows and breaks up the earth,  
so shall our bones be scattered at the mouth of Sheol.*<sup>[b]</sup>

In verse 7 we hear a new voice – a first person plural voice – the voice of the community.  
This is the voice of those who have *heard* the words of the Psalmist!  
They have heard the “pleasant words” – the delightful words of Jesus –  
and yet they are still waiting...

“Make haste, O God, to save me”!

We are like Ezekiel’s dry bones – scattered at the mouth of Sheol!



Yes, we are back in the land – yes, we are seeking to follow and trust the LORD  
in the very ordinary day-to-day life that we live!

But we are dry bones – very very dry!  
There is no life in us!

That’s all that the church says in Psalm 141.  
Our bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave.

We *need* Jesus!

And so we hear the voice of Jesus again in verse 8:

**c. So My Eyes Are Toward *You*, O God, My Lord (v8)**

<sup>8</sup> *But my eyes are toward you, O GOD, my Lord;  
in you I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless!*<sup>[c]</sup>

This is the voice of Jesus –  
the first person singular of a “Psalm of David” – a “David Psalm” –

David as he speaks for Israel.  
Jesus as he speaks for us.  
Jesus as he cried out at Gethsemane – and again at the cross.

**d. Protect Me from Their Trap – But Let Them Fall in It (v9-10)**

<sup>9</sup> *Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me  
and from the snares of evildoers!*  
<sup>10</sup> *Let the wicked fall into their own nets,  
while I pass by safely.*

And so once again we see that God’s justice is a sort of “poetic justice.”  
Those who seek to destroy others will be destroyed.  
Those who seek to ensnare others will be caught in their own traps.

Jesus explained how this works,  
when he said that by the measure you use, it will be measured to you.  
God will judge you according to the way that you judged others.

I realize that when *some* people hear this, they think,  
“well, then if I never judge anyone, then God won’t judge me!”

But that’s not possible!

You make judgments every day!  
You decide what is good – what is bad –  
    when a child is getting beaten up,  
    you aren't going to say, "Oh, who am I to judge?!"  
No, you are going to make a judgment and you are going to rescue the child!

But even if you don't rescue a child – you have still made a judgment!  
You have judged that the child was not worth rescuing!  
And so God will treat you the way you treated that child.  
    You're not worth rescuing!

How much more, then do verses 9-10 fit here:

<sup>9</sup> *Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me  
    and from the snares of evildoers!*

<sup>10</sup> *Let the wicked fall into their own nets,  
    while I pass by safely.*

Jesus feet *were ensnared* – for a short time!  
    But God raised him from the dead and seated him in glory!  
    He passed through suffering and death.

One final note.

All of these prayers clearly indicate that God *could do the opposite*.  
If God does not set a guard over my mouth – I'll say a lot of worthless stuff...  
If God turns my heart to evil – then I will busy myself with wicked deeds.  
If God does not send a righteous man to strike me,  
    then I will never realize that I'm on the wrong path –  
    and I will wind up sitting in the seat of mockers

Make haste, O God, to save me!!!