

“A Prayer for Preservation”
Psalm 141
(Preached at Trinity, November 24, 2013)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Sin is at the very heart of the human condition. **Psalm 141** follows David's prayer for deliverance in **Psa. 140**. In **Psa. 140** he cries out, in **Verse 1**, "Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man;"
 - A. David is expressing the condition of humanity.
 1. Our hearts are corrupt. He says in **Verse 2** – "Which imagine mischiefs in *their* heart" – The word for "mischiefs" is the word translated "evil" in **Verse 1**.
 2. The problem with lost humanity is a heart problem
Matthew 12:34-35 KJV - "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. ³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."
 - B. David calls them wicked, violent and proud. David isn't describing some isolated group of evil, wicked men; perhaps suffering from some disease that the rest of us have avoided. He is talking about the universal plague of sin that has infected every human being. This includes you and me.
2. The lost person glories in his sin. Paul describes you well in **Phil. 3**
Philippians 3:18-19 KJV - "*they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is their* belly, and whose glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things."
 - A. Few of you would own such a charge. You wouldn't say you glory in your sin or that your god is your belly.
 - B. The truth is, for those of you who have not forsaken your sin and followed Christ, this verse describes you perfectly.
You are not willing to turn away from your sin and give your life to Christ. You are not willing to trust Him for salvation. You are not willing to live a life of holiness. You would rather focus your life on earthly things. You are an enemy of the cross and an enemy of God.
3. But Christians are not immune to the danger of falling into sin.
The difference between the Christian and the unbeliever is largely twofold:
 - A. The Christian has been forgiven of his sin - the Law no longer condemns him
 - B. The Christian has entered into warfare with the remaining sin in his life. He prays that God will protect him from falling into sin.
4. This is the nature of **Psalm 141**. Where **Psalm 140** is the cry of David for deliverance from evil men, **Psalm 141** is a cry for God to deliver him from himself—that God would preserve him from falling into the sins of the wicked man and the continual temptation to compromise.

5. **Psalm 141** is in the form of a passionate prayer. We find this prayer divided into four petitions:

- I. A prayer for uncompromising commitment – **Verses 1-4**
- II. A prayer for unwavering correction – **Verse 5**
- III. A prayer for unlimited comprehension – **Verse 6**
- IV. A prayer for unfailing confidence – **Verses 7-10**

I. A prayer for uncompromising commitment – **Verses 1-4**

- A. We first notice David's passion in this prayer
 - 1. The KJV translates it, "LORD, I cry unto thee." Most translations fail to capture the weightiness of the word.
 - a. **NAU** - "O LORD, I call upon You"
 - b. The Septuagint translates it well with the word: κρᾶζω which means "to scream."
 - 2. David is praying with passion because it is a matter of great importance to him. Notice the urgency: "make haste unto me"
 - 3. His prayer was lifted up in holy reverence and worship – **Verse 2**
 - 4. What is drawing David to pray with such passion and urgency?
- B. David is praying for God's aid in protecting him from sin
 - 1. He prayed that God would help him guard his tongue from speaking any word that would be sinful – **Verse 3**
 - a. That he would not murmur and complain about his current trouble
 - b. That he would not return insult for insult upon the evil doers
1 Peter 3:8-9 NAU - "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead"
 - c. His prayer is that God would help him guard his tongue—help him keep the door of his lips. His prayer was that his tongue would be an instrument of grace, not a weapon of destruction.
 - 2. David prayed that God would help him guard his heart – **Verse 4**
 - a. David prayed that he would not be tempted to share in the sins of the evil doers.
 - b. That he would not be tempted to enter into the things that the wicked adore.
- C. What a powerful consideration for us
 - 1. First, that we would have such a passion for holiness. That it would consume a great part of our prayer life. It is a part of the Lord's Prayer – "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."
 - 2. We must be continually aware of the danger
 - a. Satan is continually poised to tempt us to sin. Paul describes it as Satan shooting fiery arrows at us. He deceives with his lies and tempts us with promises of great delight.
 - b. This world is filled with temptations to pursue its dainties.
Psalm 141:4 KJV - "let me not eat of their dainties."
 - 3. Only a true hatred of sin will result in such passion to flee all appearance of evil.

II. A prayer for unwavering correction – Verse 5

A. David prayed that God would send the righteous to correct him

1. David knew the deceitfulness of his own heart. He knew from experience how powerful the lusts of his flesh could be.
2. His sin with Bathsheba showed how powerful the lusts of the flesh were.
3. God blessed him in sending Nathan to call him to repentance
2 Samuel 12:7-9 KJV - " And Nathan said to David, Thou *art* the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; ⁸ And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. ⁹ Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife *to be* thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon."
2 Samuel 12:13 KJV - "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."
4. **Psalm 51** is a powerful reminder of David's sin
Psalm 51:2-4 KJV - "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. ⁴ Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight"
5. How much further would David had fallen into the corruption of sin if God had not mercifully sent Nathan?
6. Now David prays, "Let the righteous smite me; *it shall be* a kindness: and let him reprove me; *it shall be* an excellent oil, *which* shall not break my head"
Proverbs 27:6 KJV - "Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful."

B. Are you willing for your brother or sister to correct you?

1. It is most humbling to be confronted in our sin.
2. It is part of our covenant duty—to both watch over one another and to invite correction when we sin.
 "I further promise, therefore, to watch over my brothers and sisters in Christ in brotherly love, and faithfully warn, exhort, and admonish them as occasion may require. Should I stray from the commands of Scripture, I agree to, and invite, the correction and admonishment of the elders."
3. One of the blessings of being a part of a local church is the accountability we have towards one another.
4. It is infinitely better to be corrected by a brother than by the lost. How terrible it is for the lost to witness your sins. How terrible it is to bring a reproach upon the Kingdom of God.
 "O let the righteous smite me!"

III. A prayer for unlimited comprehension – **Verse 6**

A. One of the great protections against sin is discernment

1. This verse is difficult to interpret.
 - a. The judges of **Verse 6** are most likely referring to the judges of the wicked.
 - b. Their job was to discern controversies between men and to deliver just judgment. Only their wisdom was without understanding and their judgment was not good.
 - c. This is likely referring to Saul who led Israel to sin. After the death of Solomon Jeroboam's wicked leadership would bring down God's judgment upon Israel.
1 Kings 14:16 KJV - "And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin."
 - d. They were dashed against the rocks
Verse 6 - "overthrown in stony places"
2. David's judgment was good. He had the wisdom of God. After the death of Saul Israel looked to David – his words were a sweet savor.
3. Such wisdom protected David from following the ways of the wicked. And he was able to lead others to follow God in righteousness.

B. May God grant us transformed minds to discern His will

- Romans 12:2 KJV** - "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."
1. Only God's Word will fill our minds with God's wisdom
 2. We are always in danger of following our own way or pursuing the ways of this world. Such wisdom is bound to be overthrown and cast upon the rocks.
 3. We must passionately pursue God's wisdom of truth in His Word.

IV. A prayer for unflinching confidence – **Verses 7-10**

A. The attacks of David's enemies were relentless

1. David describes the severity of their attack in **Verse 7**
Psalms 141:7 KJV - "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth."
Psalms 141:7 NAS - "As when one plows and breaks open the earth, Our bones have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol."
2. But David maintained absolute confidence upon God
Psalms 141:8 NAS - "For my eyes are toward Thee, O God, the Lord; In Thee I take refuge"
3. He knew that God was his refuge, his Deliverer.
Psalms 18:2-3 NAS - "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. ³ I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies."

- B. David's confidence, however, was not mere presumption
1. He continued his passionate urgent prayer
Verse 8 - "leave not my soul destitute."
Verse 9 - "Keep me from the snares *which* they have laid for me"
Verse 10 - "Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I
withal escape."
 2. David refused to take his eyes off of the source of his confidence

Conclusion:

1. We need such desperation in our prayers for God's preserving grace. We are always in danger of sin. Paul wrote:
1 Corinthians 10:12 KJV - "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."
2. When we march forth in our own strength we are doomed to failure. The work of mortification demands great energy and discipline, but it is not simply a human work. God, by His Spirit, is the power behind the mortification of sin. John Owen writes of the Holy Spirit's work in our sanctification:
"He only is sufficient for this work; all ways and means without him are a thing of naught. In vain do men seek other remedies; they shall not be healed by them. I might here bewail the endless, foolish labour of poor souls, who being convinced of sin, and not able to stand against the power of their convictions, do set themselves, by innumerable perplexing ways and duties, to keep down sin, but being strangers to the Spirit of God, all in vain. They combat without victory, have war without peace, and are in slavery all their days." (Works of Owen, Vol. 6, pages 16, 20).
3. We must labor hard in our perseverance but we must cry out to God for His preserving grace – **V.1** - "make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee."
4. Is that how you pray regarding the remaining sin in your life?