

GOD STILL CARES FOR MY SOUL!

Psalm 142: 1-7 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

The end of prayer is praise. It has been said, “The prayer of complaint is the backbone of the Psalms.” If that is true, why is it appropriate to name these 150 psalms as praises? Is that false advertising? Is it putting an attractive smile and pasting it on the cover of the Psalms which contain so much pain and doubt and trouble? Is it the idea that “just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down?” The Psalms so often take us to the painful heart of David being rejected by others, alienated from others by their aloofness and hatred, and finding him at times, feeling the guilt of his own sin. So why do I maintain, beloved, that the end of all prayer is truly praise? Any prayer to God, no matter how desperate is its origin, no matter how angry and fearful the person is who is praying, any prayer to God always ends up in praise. Prayer may not take us to praise easily or quickly. The trip may take a lifetime of prayer, but the end of all prayer is praise. Knowing that about prayer ought to remind us as we pray that “the end is where we ought to start from,” as we pray, as T. S. Eliot once said. God often uses the certainty of His answering our prayers in our hearts, to lure us on to the finish line. Each of us are unfinished creatures. We don’t have genetic chips in us that program us to have hope. But from the time we were young and adults walked up to us, they would ask us, remember, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” It isn’t in our genetic code that determines this. Ultimately for us as believers, it is our many prayers in seeking to know the will of God that brings us today to worship and praise the Lord. When everyone else quits believing in us, God never ever stops caring for our souls. As we begin this psalm, my advice to you all is, “Pray the psalms.” When you learn to pray the psalms, you will become praise-filled as David was.

Recently, Pastor Larry shared in a message how many pastors are relieved monthly from their ministry. The statistics I found are that 20% of all pastors are asked to leave their charges. David Jeremiah tells of a pastor who wasn’t asked to quit, but he did after 18 years. Why? His reason was, as you will hear, he felt no one cared for his soul. Here’s the story. Listen to his explanation of what happened to him after 18 years of serving God. He said: “I realized those years had made me look and feel 10 years older than I was. I had spent those years holding people's hands, smoothing out countless interpersonal battles, working through church struggles, preaching how many hundreds of sermons, baptizing people, marrying them, burying them. As the church grew, so did the counseling in my office. I was not surprised at this, nor was I unaware of my calling, and the demands I had to face in serving. But in all that time, I could not find a confidante, not even my wife. Because most of the human problems I dealt with were confidential, I could not find someone who could simply listen and pray with me. While I struggled to find new and fresh sermon material, time for my own devotional life disappeared.

When the church reached 1200 members from the first 300, it was a sign of the great blessing of God upon my ministry. I accepted that and I thanked God for it, but at the same time I found myself even more lonely as the demands on my time tripled. My family was grown up and away from me. I watched my own children graduate from high school and then college. I realized I hardly knew them. I knew then I had to do something, though I was a little late, 18 years late. I concluded I could not abide the lonely road any longer. As much as I sensed I was leaving an arena with its joys and triumphs as well as its sorrows and tensions, I knew I had to find some area of work where I could establish normal human relationships. I had to find a different job. Maybe I was just not cut out to be a pastor after all.”

Life gets terribly lonely at times. We live in a difficult, sad world in which many King Saul’s are after David, and many David’s are crying out to God from their Cave of Adullam. Like David in Psalm 142, which he calls a maskil, a psalm designated for God’s people to memorize, David concluded, in verse 4, “No refuge remains for me; no one cares for my soul.” In life, there will be times of deep distress when we are standing alone. In those times of loneliness and frustration, there is a wonderful psalm we may pray to God—Psalm 142. David was in a “lonesome valley” when he wrote this Psalm. His “lonesome valley” was a cave, where he was evidently very alone, beset with trouble on every side. Only in God did David find refuge. This cave most commentators believe was the Cave of Adullam. It appears that if this is the case, David prayed this prayer alone and God answered in an amazing way. In I Samuel 22: 1-2, after David barely escaped from the Philistines and the king of Gath, King Achish, by feigning he was a madman, David got away and hid alone in the Cave of Adullam. We read, “David departed from there—(from Gath) and escaped to the Cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father’s house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became captain over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.” This maskil of instruction is provided in God’s Word to teach us that caves and places and times of intense pressure and testing are good closets for prayer. Being forced by fear of death into silence and solitude can do much to lead us into deeper devotion to our Lord.

Such pressures not only expose our faith at its weakest, our success at its lowest, and our reputation at its worst, but when we pray, affliction can press us into our greatest hours of trusting God in the dark and affliction may open the door for us to God’s mightiest miracles. S. D. Gordon once said, “Prayer is striking the winning blow at the concealed enemy. Service is gathering up the results of that winning blow among the people we see and touch.” I agree, but it isn’t always true that the enemy of our soul is concealed. When the roaring lion is on the prowl, and his blood hounds are on our trail, audibly barking trail, and hoping soon to bark

treed—to capture us, what can we do? What can we do, as saints of the Lord? What can we expect of God when we are chased into the Cave of Adullam as David was? What can we expect of God when we get to the back of our “lonely caves” and we have no place to retreat? Psalm 142 gives us five solid expectations we can all expect in our greatest times of isolation, loneliness and pressure. Today, try with me to adjust your eyes to the darkness in David’s cave. Go inside with me and listen with me to David’s prayer. Learn with me what to do when your heart is overwhelmed. Learn as David did to pour out your trouble to the Lord and learn what you can expect from Him.

WHEN OUR PRAYER IS INTENSELY PERSONAL, GOD LISTENS. (I.)

Notice verses 1-2. “With my voice, I cry out to the Lord; with my voice, I plead for mercy to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before Him; I tell my trouble before Him.” This wasn’t just an inward prayer in David’s heart. He was crying out loud to the Lord. Sometimes when we put the trouble we are in, into words as we cry out to God, the trouble seems less threatening. Notice, David is not giving us a model prayer beginning with adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and then petition. No, David skips over everything but petition as he cried out in anguish and desperation. David wasn’t going to run from cave to cave and edit his prayer so all of us would approve it. No, he was sobbing, crying, and choking with tears, almost convulsing with his plight. And you can be sure, God not only heard David’s prayer, but David heard it again and again as his words echoed in the caverns of Adullam. This cave of Adullam is a cavern, a maze of tunnels and connecting caverns, where some weeks later, in answer to David’s plea to God, his family and 400 men came and surrounded him with support. But as this psalm was cried out, David was alone.

One treasure in my library is an 1881 book written by William M. Thomson, called “The Land And The Book.” I took it down and read. From pages 332-335, he describes his famous exploration into the cave. He crawled half doubled over through a narrow crevice opening into the first grand chamber of the cave. With many lights, he said, “We could see very little in the damp darkness as we groped from room to room. To get into the cave, we had to take a tiny winding path along a narrow shelf of rock with gigantic cliffs above and a fearful gorge below. Then to get in the opening, we had to make a long jump from a shelf of rock to a low window opening.” Be certain, this was where David was climbing, caving, jumping, hiding and now crying for his very life. And be sure, David’s intense prayers got through to God. He held nothing back. He poured out his complaint—here he was anointed to be the second king of Israel by Samuel and Israel’s first king was after his life. God could take David complaining, and He can take our complaining—telling God all his trouble. The Hebrew word for complaint is **siyach**. This word means to converse, to complain, literally to meditate and even to

babble. Beloved, God can even decipher unintelligible sobs. The complaint is not about God, but about his situation. David gave the Lord, blow by blow the awful predicament he was in—maybe at times even lost in the prison of this cavern. God listened. He heard, and ultimately, God brought David out. Secondly,

WHEN OUR SPIRIT IS OVERWHELMED, GOD KNOWS AND SEES. (II.)

Notice verse 3. “When my spirit faints within me, You know my way! In the path where I walk, they have hidden a trap for me.” David sounds like Job here who said, in Job 23: 10, “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Many a time in my caves of ministry when I have sobbed out my woes to the Lord, I have sung Job’s song. Maybe David sang Job 23: 10. I sing the song often as my mother wrote music for it. Beloved, God sees the traps set for us. He has watched me all these years, as I am in the middle of my 50th year in pastoral ministry. He knows. He sees my overwhelmed spirit. Song – He knows. In our caves of Adullam, songs of praise are born. Remember I told you—“The end of prayer is praise.” Jeremy Camp’s song I love to sing along with him—“He Knows.” Let me remind you of those words that mirror verse 3. “All the bitter weary ways, Endless striving day by day, You barely have the strength to pray In the valley low And how hard your fight has been How deep the pain within Wounds that no one else has seen Hurts too much to show All the doubt you're standing in between And all the weight that brings you to your knees He knows He knows Every hurt and every sting He has walked the suffering He knows He knows Let your burdens come undone Lift your eyes up to the one Who knows He knows We may faint and we may sink Feel the pain and near the brink But the dark begins to shrink When you find the one who knows The chains of doubt that held you in between One by one are starting to break free He knows He knows. Every hurt and every sting He has walked the suffering He knows, He knows!” Nothing is hidden to God. No secret snare is hidden from Him. He sees. He knows. Thirdly,

WHEN OUR FUTURE IS HOPELESS, GOD IS OUR REFUGE. (III.)

Notice verses 4-5 and even hear the poetry in David’s cry. “Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. I cry to you, O LORD; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.” All David’s escape routes were blocked. No human being at this moment cared for his soul—at least, none that David saw. No one was beside him to cry with him. No one offered to give David a hiding place, a refuge. This is what drives us to the Lord. David cried to God, “You are my refuge.” The Hebrew word for refuge is **machceh**. Machceh can be a place or a person. As a place, it means a place of hope, a refuge in the storm, a place we trust, and a shelter. But as a person, machceh means a confidante, or figuratively, it speaks of dwelling under God’s wings of protection. (Psalm 91: 1) David at this moment was the anointed king but he was banned from his earthly inheritance in the promised land. He was cut off

from his own inheritance in Bethlehem—and certainly blocked from his anointed kingship in Jerusalem. When we have lost it all, but we still have Jesus, we have all we need. God must become our Champion, our Refuge in the severest storm, and our place of retreat as we look up to Him. Fourthly,

WHEN OUR STRENGTH IS GONE, GOD PAYS SPECIAL ATTENTION.

(IV.) Notice verse 6. “Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!” David is asking for God to give him special attention in the cave where he was hidden. Beloved, we may feel like David, like the weakest outlaw to every hide out in a cave. Frank E. Graeff wrote the words to the hymn, “Does Jesus Care?” The chorus goes, “O yes, He cares—I know He cares! His heart is touched with my grief; when the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares. From Psalm 142: 6, William Blake, that amazing 17th century poet wrote, listen to his thoughts about David’s words—“Attend to my cry.” He wrote, “Can I see another’s woe, And not be in sorrow too? Can I see another’s grief, and not seek for kind relief? Can I see a falling tear, and not feel my sorrow’s share? Can a father see his child weep, nor be with sorrow filled? Can a mother sit and hear an infant groan, an infant fear? No, no; never can it be! Never, never can it be! And can He, who smiles on all, Hear the wren, with sorrows small—Hear the small bird’s grief and care, Hear the woes that infants bear, And not sit beside the nest, Pouring pity in its breast? And not sit the cradle near, Weeping tear on infant’s tear? And not sit both night and day wiping all our tears away? Oh, no, never can it be! Never, never can it be! He doth give His joy to all; He becomes an infant small; He becomes a man of woe; He doth feel the sorrow too. Think not thou canst sigh a sigh, and thy Maker is not by; Think not thou canst weep a tear, And they Maker is not near. Oh! He gives to us His joy, That our grief He may destroy: Till our grief is fled and gone, He doth sit by us and moan.” Yes, God does pay each of us special attention. Fifthly,

WHEN OUR SOUL IS IN PRISON, GOD SETS US FREE. (V.)

“Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to Your name. The righteous will surround me, or You will deal bountifully with me.” Not only was David locked up bodily in the cave of Adullam, but his soul and his emotions were locked up as he desperately cried to go free. Despair is life’s deepest darkest prison. Only God can free our souls when depression and despair lock us up in their dejected cells of dashed hopes and dreams. These prison cells are cells of faltering in despondency and desperation, cells believing at the time that our losses are irrecoverable losses. Locked up in this dungeon of despair, millions of Americans, countless numbers this very day will end their lives with suicide, as they seek freedom that is never once found in suicide. Death is not our Savior, but like the cave of Adullam, it is a cavern leading us not to freedom, but leading us to have to stand before God to answer for what we did with God’s gift of life. The physical cave to David was not

half the dungeon that persecution and temptation were for his soul. In the cave, he was exiled from fellowship with the righteous. He longed for the courts of the Lord, where the righteous would surround him, and God would deal bountifully with him. God didn't take him to church, but as it were, God brought church, He brought fellowship to David as his family came to his cave and 400 men came out of nowhere to stay with him. This psalm that began with David crying about his condition and it ended seven verses later with David singing because of His Savior.

Many years ago, a poor Spanish sailor was brought into the Liverpool Hospital to die. Liverpool is a maritime city in northwest England, where the River Mersey meets the Irish Sea. After he had breathed his last, it was found that over his heart, he had painfully made a rude but indelible representation of Christ on the Cross. Somehow the sailor wanted Jesus near his heart. Sailors in that day commonly did this kind of needle-pointing puncturing. Oh, beloved, if we could have the promise that Jesus cares for our soul imprinted not on, but in, our hearts, and in the hearts of all of us as members of God's church, what a difference it would make! Then, what that poor sailor painfully, with needle-point punctures over his heart had painfully tried to do, we would own as our own. We would regain our power as God's church. We would see revival at home and abroad, revival rivalling that of the apostles and the great awakenings. I pray today as Fanny Crosby wrote it, "Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word. Tell me the story most precious, Sweetest that ever was heard." May God write His love for you inside your soul—"I care for you. I love you, I died for you. I died to redeem you. Come to Me. Lean hard on Me."