

PSALM 61

THE PRAYER OF AN EXPELLED KING

“Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer!” The most intense personality is wrapped up in this petition; David says, “my cry” and “my prayer.” This is the voice of an exile – a man far from the city which he loves most; and yet, even at the extremity of the land, he says he will cry unto God. And why not? God can give the exile a home! Wherever He reveals Himself in loving pity and all the riches of His grace, the soul may take its rest – knowing that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up there. David cried from the end of the land, and we have often cried from the same extremity. But by processes too complex for us to comprehend, God has often caused our most terrible misfortunes to become our greatest blessings!

In the midst of the Psalmist’s trouble, there rises an aspiration: “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I!” The self-helplessness expressed in this prayer moves our entire sympathy. “Lead me” – that is what a blind man would say when he has wandered from the path; it is what a lame man would say when he has fallen by reason of his great weakness; it is what a terrified man would say when he has to pass along the edge of a bottomless abyss. It is in such extremities that men best know themselves. David wished to be led to “the rock”; he wished to stand firmly, and above the floodline, so that he might enjoy rest after such great disquietude. But is there a rock that is higher than ourselves? Yes! We have heard Jesus called by this name; we have heard of Him as the Rock of ages; we have heard of Him as the Rock in the wilderness; we have heard of Him as the Cornerstone that was rejected of the builders, but which was chosen by God to occupy the most important place.

The Psalmist’s aspiration is succeeded by a recollection (verse 3). History is rightly used when it becomes the guide of Hope. The days of a man’s life seem to be cut off from each other by the nights which intervene, but they are continuous when they are viewed from the altitude of Divine Providence. The experiences of yesterday will help to enrich today. All the historic triumphs of the Divine arm stimulate us in the present spiritual battle. We may say of God, “What You have been, You will still continue to be. Because You have inclined Your ear unto us, therefore we will call upon You as long as we live!”

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

This Psalm is a pearl. It is little, but precious. To many a mourner, it has provided words when the mind could not have devised speech for itself. It was evidently composed by David after he had come to the throne (verse 6). The second verse leads us to believe that it was written during the Psalmist’s forced exile from the Tabernacle, which was the visible dwelling-place of God: so the period of Absalom’s rebellion has been most suitably suggested as the date of its authorship, and one writer is correct in entitling it, “Prayer and thanksgiving of an expelled king on his way back to his throne.”



“I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever,” David continues; “I will trust in the covert of thy wings.” Here is a beautiful combination: worship and confidence! The relationship is not only beautiful, but it is also tightly interlocked; for worship is confidence, and confidence is worship. To truly kneel before God is to express trust in Him, and to truly express trust in Him is to bow down and worship at His footstool. This is the complete idea of worship: not prayer alone, not hope alone, not adoration alone, and not a blind dependence alone; but all combined and rounded into one great act of life!

“Under the covert of thy wings” – how tender a figure of speech! The mother-bird spreads her wings over the nest where her young ones lie; and thus she gives them warmth, and provides them with all the protection that is in her power. Such a frail thing is the nest of a bird; and yet what a beautiful image it is of unity, defense, completeness, and safety! Multiply that image by infinity; carry it far above all the misfortunes which may still befall the little home of the bird – and then see how full of comfort the idea is!

In conclusion, this Psalm presents us with the pictures of a shelter, a tower, and a tabernacle – words which have much meaning for the heart under innumerable distresses, and which reach their full explanation only in that great Saving Man Who was wounded for our transgressions!

Lord Jesus, we praise You for the assurance that our confidence may be fixed upon You, for You are an exceedingly high and glorious Rock that never changes. Thank You for the confidence that we may enjoy when we find shelter on this lofty Rock; for from its heights, we may defy the hurricanes that assail us! Amen.