

CRY FOR MERCY!

Psalm 28: 1-9 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Asking for help can be humbling, but all of us get in fixes in our lives which ultimately require us to acknowledge our own personal inadequacy. I've been there more than once, and I know you have been there too. Yet it is difficult for us usually to admit defeat, to admit we can't do it on our own. We thought we could. Until we come to the place in our own situation where we can't handle it anymore, we often persistently struggle, we strive, we sigh, we sob, and we finally realize we are in over our heads. We are out of our depth, even in great danger. We tried so hard to fix it ourselves. We were doing it well until something happened that further humbled us, and crushed our pride. Finally, we've cried out for God's help.

Early in ministry, while I was serving as pastor in the Evangelical Free Church of Bloomington-Normal, Illinois, I tackled some jobs I wasn't skilled in doing. Yet, my finances were scarce and I was doing all I could to make it happen. One Saturday night, I was under my Chevrolet Caprice in our garage. I had the car jacked up and sitting on blocks with the emergency brake on. It is painful to tell my story because I like to think I have skills with my hands, but I am no skilled mechanic. That night I knew it for sure. All I had to do was to remove the old worn out exhaust manifold and I had the new one waiting in the wings to replace the old one. Nevertheless the old exhaust manifold with holes in it, was seized tightly to the old tail pipe and muffler system. I used a big screw driver and a hammer trying to break it loose. I finally saw a bit of progress and I got the screwdriver wedged into a place where I decided to hit it. It moved again. So now I grabbed part of the frame under the car and gave it a strong hit. The hammer glanced off and nailed my index finger on my left hand. Blood was oozing out of the knuckle. But glory, progress was showing now. A couple more hits and I would have it. I decided to be more careful but try the same hit as before. I hadn't yet learned the lesson that "if you continue to do what you've always done, you'll continue to get what you've always got. The second try did exactly that. Again I glanced off and hit my same forefinger that was squirting blood. I had been on this job for too long. It was after midnight in my garage and I preached the next morning. Now I finally cried out to the Lord. I cried, "Jesus, help me!" It wasn't much different from David's cry in Psalm 28: 1, "To you, O Lord, I call, my Rock, do not be deaf to me, lest if You be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit." I was desperate now.

Immediately, I heard a voice say, "Pastor, do you need some help?" I said, "Who's there?" I hear the reply, "It's Hans, Hans Hankemeier." I asked him, "Why are you

here? Who called you?” He said, “Well, I was asleep until God woke me up and said to me, “Get up and go help Pastor Carlson.” He exchanged places with me under the car, and I ran in the house and bandaged my badly bruised and bleeding finger. I came out shortly, and Hans was a professional mechanic. God knows who to call. When I got back out to the garage, he had the old exhaust manifold off and the new one on. That day I decided that I am not a mechanic, and I need help if it’s a mechanical problem. I can’t do it on my own, even if it is cheaper. Time is worth something, and if you can’t fix a problem, it doesn’t matter how long you try, time is money and it gets too expensive in time.

David elaborates more on his dilemma in Psalm 28: 2, saying, “Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward Your most holy sanctuary.” Beloved, God is a prayer hearing and prayer answering God. Our problem is often that we are remiss and slow to ask Him for help. What causes us to cry to Him for help? What makes us believe that rescue is possible or even probable for us? God doesn’t send us help because we deserve it. He doesn’t help us because of our special credentials or because we have earned some special privileges. He doesn’t help us because we are so faithful to Him. He hears us and He answers when we cry for His mercy. God yearns for us to cry to Him for mercy. (v. 2) As we take a few brief moments to meditate on David’s cry for mercy, I want us to learn afresh or for the first time what it means to respect and revere and reverence the Lord and the work of His hands. His hands are far more skilled than our hands or the gifted hands of Dr. Ben Carson, or the skilled hands of my dear friend and brother, Hans Hankemeier. Here are two lessons today we need to remember which will teach us to reverence the Lord and especially the work of His hands. Here they are! What does God yearn for us to learn?

GOD YEARNS FOR US TO EXPRESS TO HIM OUR FEARS AND UTTER DESPERATION AS WE CRY FOR MERCY. (I.) David’s prayer in verses 1-5

is all about fears and utter desperation. Listen again now and realize God yearns for us to seek Him with the same passion. “To You, Oh Lord, I call, my Rock, be not deaf to me, (Hear me, Jesus, don’t turn a deaf ear to me) Lest if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.” (Lord, don’t ignore me or my doom is sealed. Death will overtake me and I’ll be in the grave. Run to my peril, Lord. Help me, I’m dying.) Verse 2—“Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help.” (Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.) When I lift up my hands toward you most holy sanctuary—hear me, come to my rescue, now Lord.) Sometimes we only raise our hands in worship and praise, but watch David,

for he is raising his hands to the Lord in desperate prayer. Beloved, raise your hands to God in prayer.

The prayer gets more desperate in verse 3. Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil who speak peace with their neighbors while evil is in their hearts. (Don't take me to the dump, Lord. Don't send me to the grave. Don't give up on me like You would if I kept cooking up evil in my heart while I am talking kindly and peacefully to my neighbors.) Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds; give to them according to the work of their hands; render them their due reward. (v.4) (Lord, see me in mercy for who I am, even though I am not perfect, see me differently from those who practice wickedness and those for whom You are planning their ultimate judgment.) Because, v. 5, They do not regard or respect or reverence the works of the Lord or the work of Your hands. (Lord, You know so many wicked folk laugh at the idea that You created the world, they laugh at the idea that life begins at conception and that tiny unborn babies are precious in your sight. They don't see Your hand in opening the womb and Your hand in bringing mothers through labor to safe delivery. They don't believe You will judge the wicked in hell. They don't respect marriages that You have sanctified, families that are dedicated to You.) David is pulling out the stops begging for help, crying for mercy. His fears are out in the open—He doesn't want to die yet and go to the grave. He is telling God he knows he doesn't deserve help, but he is affirming that God will not continue to help the wicked. Verse 5 is clear, "God will tear the wicked down and build them up no more." David's fears and desperate prayers are now before God, crying for mercy.

These first five verses of praying in fear and desperation, show us that David is praying about three sets of hands. Psalm 28 refers to three sets of hands. The psalmist lifted up his own hands to the Lord in verse 2. The enemies of God were doing evil work with their hands, in verse 4. But God had His hands at work as well, in verse 5. Wicked people have dirty hands. Such people defile everything they touch. That hurts them and it hurts many others. We are grieved at this, especially when they want to touch us and defile us. David saw his enemies' evil hands. His response was--he lifted up his own hands to the Lord and cried for help, saying, "Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to You for help, when I lift up my hands toward Your most holy sanctuary" (v. 2). When Old Testament believers saw danger ahead and they prayed, they didn't fold their hands. No, they lifted them up to God in praise and prayer and expectancy that God was going to do something—that He was going to deliver them. When we see the evil hands of Satan's crowd doing their defiling work, God keep us from joining hands with their

hands. We will be defiled and we will defile others. Let's lift our holy hands to the Lord in prayer. Paul told Timothy in I Timothy 2: 8, "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting hold hands without anger or quarrelling/wrath." Let's trust God to work. Because the enemies of the Lord do not regard His works, nor the operation of His hands, He will in the end, destroy them and build them up no more. (v. 5). Yet, God's hand is still at work today. Do you need help today? Then lift up your hands to the Lord in supplication and pleas and in fervent expectation. Soon God in mercy will hear you, answer you and you will lift up your hands in jubilation and celebration. Don't forget, God yearns for us to express to Him our fears and our utter desperation. Secondly, what does God yearn for us to learn?

GOD YEARNS FOR US TO BLESS HIM FOR BEING OUR STRENGTH, OUR SHIELD, OUR SAVING REFUGE AND OUR SHEPHERD. (II.) Notice verses 6-9. "Blessed be the Lord! For He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; In Him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song, I give thanks to Him. The Lord is the strength of His people; He is the saving refuge of His anointed. Oh, save Your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever." Don't believe those who say in their commentaries that verses 6-9 are another psalm because there is such a dramatic change. It is a sudden transition, but it is what happens when we cry to God transparently for mercy, when our desperation is there for Him to see and hear. Suddenly, the scene is changed. All misgivings and doubts and fears and desperation are over, at an end, all fears are conquered. It's time to praise the Lord for He has changed what? There's no mention that God changed any outward circumstances for David, but God showed up for David and reassured Him of His everlasting arms of love and mercy. David is now praising the Lord with vigor and with victory. David doesn't say God has answered his prayer. No, verse 6 is praise that God has heard the voice of David's cry for mercy.

For David, it is enough to know God has heard. David believed that God was a prayer hearing and answering God. He believed he had prayed through and that God was fully aware of his request. God had heard. That was enough. He could trust God for the rest. Beloved, as we prepare for the Lord's Supper, the biggest part of the battle is giving up our self-sufficiency and crying to God for mercy. As I am ready to come to the Table of the Lord today, one of Heather's songs she wrote is strong in my heart. I want to sing it to you for it is a song of finally giving up our pride and crying to God for mercy.

“Lord, you see me run and parade around the cliff. Proud of my courage to defy Your limits. Why won’t I stay in the shelter of the fold; It’s my foolish heart that needs Your strong hold, So shepherd me, I find it hard to make it on my own, I need Your rod and staff to bring me home. O restore my soul, Guide me, Put me on Your shoulders and rescue me, O shepherd me.” (2) Lord, my mind is crowded with the busyness of life, drinking from Your Word, no time seems right. Why won’t I listen when You know it all, It’s my foolish heart that needs Your strong hold. So shepherd me, I find it hard to make it on my own, I need Your rod and staff to bring me home. O restore my soul, Guide me, Put me on Your shoulders and rescue me, O shepherd me.” (3) Lord, my heart is longing for Your coming in the clouds, Listening to Your voice, the world gets loud, my garden’s heart needs weeded, but I don’t want to hoe, It’s my foolish heart that needs Your strong hold, So shepherd me, I find it hard to make it on my own, I need Your rod and staff to bring me home. O restore my soul, Guide me, Put me on Your shoulders and rescue me, O shepherd me.” (Repeat). Bow your heads.