

PSALM 57

This psalm is very much like that which goes next before it; it was penned upon a like occasion, when David was both in danger of trouble and in temptation to sin; it begins as that did, “Be merciful to me;” the method also is the same.

I. He begins with prayer and complaint, yet not without some assurance of speeding in his request (v. 1-6).

II. He concludes with joy and praise (v. 7-11). So that hence we may take direction and encouragement, both in our supplications and in our thanksgivings, and may offer both to God, in singing this psalm.

~~450~~ PSALM 57:1-6

PRAAYER IN AFFLICTION

*To the chief musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David,
when he fled from Saul in the cave.*

The title of this psalm has one word new in it, *Al-taschith* — *Destroy not*. Some make it to be only some known tune to which this psalm was set; others apply it to the occasion and matter of the psalm. *Destroy not*; that is, David would not let Saul be destroyed, when now in the cave there was a fair opportunity of killing him, and his servants would fain have done so. No, says David, *destroy him not*, ~~4204~~ 1 Samuel 24:4, 6. Or, rather, God would not let David be destroyed by Saul; he suffered him to persecute David, but still under this limitation, *Destroy him hot*; as he permitted Satan to afflict Job, *Only save his life*. David must not be destroyed, for *a blessing is in him* (~~2318~~ Isaiah 65:8), even Christ, the best of blessings. When David was in the cave, in imminent peril, he here tells us what were the workings of his heart towards God; and happy are those that have such good thoughts as these in their minds when they are in danger!

I. He supports himself with faith and hope in God, and prayer to him, v. 1, 2. Seeing himself surrounded with enemies, he looks up to God with that suitable prayer: *Be merciful to me, O Lord!* which he again repeats, and it

is no vain repetition: *Be merciful unto me*. It was the publican's prayer, ^{<213>}Luke 18:13. It is a pity that any should use it slightly and profanely, should cry, *God be merciful to us*, or, *Lord, have mercy upon us*, when they mean only to express their wonder, or surprise, or vexation, but God and his mercy are not in all their thoughts. It is with much devout affection that David here prays, “*Be merciful unto me, O Lord! look with compassion upon me, and in thy love and pity redeem me.*” To recommend himself to God's mercy, he here professes,

1. That all his dependence is upon God: *My soul trusteth in thee*, v. 1. He did not only profess to trust in God, but his soul did indeed rely on God only, with a sincere devotion and self-dedication, and an entire complacency and satisfaction. He goes to God, and, at the footstool of the throne of his grace, humbly professes his confidence in him: *In the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge*, as the chickens take shelter under the wings of the hen when the birds of prey are ready to strike at them, *until these calamities be over-past*.

(1.) He was confident his troubles would end well, in due time; *these calamities will be over-past*; the storm will blow over. *Non si male nunc et olim sic erit* — *Though now distressed, I shall not always be so*. Our Lord Jesus comforted himself with this in his sufferings, ^{<227>}Luke 22:37. *The things concerning me have an end*.

(2.) He was very easy under the divine protection in the mean time.

[1.] He comforted himself in the goodness of God's nature, by which he is inclined to succour and protect his people, as the hen is by instinct to shelter her young ones. God comes upon the wing to the help of his people, which denotes a speedy deliverance (^{<180>}Psalm 18:10); and he takes them under his wing, which denotes warmth and refreshment, even when the calamities are upon them; see ^{<237>}Matthew 23:37.

[2.] In the promise of his word and the covenant of his grace; for it may refer to the out-stretched *wings of the cherubim*, between which God is said to dwell (^{<801>}Psalm 80:1) and whence he gave his oracles. “To God, as the God of grace, will I fly, and his promise shall be my refuge, and a sure passport it will be through all these danger.” God, by his promise, offers himself to us, to be trusted; we by our faith must accept of him, and put our trust in him.

2. That all his desire is towards God (v. 2): “*I will cry unto God most high, for succour and relief; to him that is most high will I lift up my soul, and pray earnestly, even unto God that performs all things for me.*” Note,

(1.) In every thing that befalls us we ought to see and own the hand of God; whatever is done is of his performing; in it his counsel is accomplished and the scripture is fulfilled.

(2.) Whatever God performs concerning his people, it will appear, in the issue, to have been performed for them and for their benefit. Though God be high, *most high*, yet he condescends so low as to take care that all things be made to work for good to them.

(3.) This is a good reason why we should, in all our straits and difficulties, cry unto him, not only pray, but pray earnestly.

3. That all his expectation is from God (v. 3): *He shall send from heaven, and save me.* Those that make God their only refuge, and fly to him by faith and prayer, may be sure of salvation, in his way and time. Observe here,

(1.) Whence he expects the salvation — from heaven. Look which way he will, in this earth, refuge fails, no help appears; but he looks for it from heaven. Those that lift up their hearts to things above may thence expect all good.

(2.) What the salvation is that he expects. He trusts that God will save him *from the reproach of those that would swallow him up*, that aimed to ruin him, and, in the mean time, did all they could to vex him. Some read it, *He shall send from heaven and save me, for he has put to shame him that would swallow me up*; he has disappointed their designs against me hitherto, and therefore he will perfect my deliverance.

(3.) What he will ascribe his salvation to: *God shall send forth his mercy and truth.* God is good in himself and faithful to every word that he has spoken, and so he makes it appear when he works deliverance for his people. We need no more to make us happy than to have the benefit of the mercy and truth of God, ~~END~~ Psalm 25:10.

II. He represents the power and malice of his enemies (v. 4): *My soul is among lions.* So fierce and furious was Saul, and those about him, against David, that he might have been as safe in a den of lions as among such

men, who were continually roaring against him and ready to make a prey of him. They are set on fire, and breathe nothing but flame; they set on fire the course of nature, inflaming one another against David, and *they were themselves set on fire of hell*, ³⁰⁸⁶James 3:6. They were sons of men, from whom one might have expected something of the reason and compassion of a man; but they were beasts of prey in the shape of men; their *teeth*, which they gnashed upon him, and with which they hoped to tear him to pieces and to eat him up, *were spears and arrows* fitted for mischiefs and murders; and their *tongue*, with which they cursed him and wounded his reputation, was *as a sharp sword* to cut and kill; see ³⁰⁸⁶Psalms 42:10. A spiteful tongue is a dangerous weapon, wherewith Satan's instruments fight against God's people. He describes their malicious projects against him (v. 6) and shows the issue of them: "*They have prepared a net for my steps*, in which to take me, that I might not again escape out of their hands; *they have digged a pit before me*, that I might, ere I was aware, run headlong into it." See the policies of the church's enemies; see the pains they take to do mischief. But let us see what comes of it.

1. It is indeed some disturbance to David: *My soul is bowed down*. It made him droop, and hang the head, to think that there should be those that bore him so much ill-will. But,

2. It was destruction to themselves; they dug a pit for David, *into the midst whereof they have fallen*. The mischief they designed against David returned upon themselves, and they were embarrassed in their counsels; then when Saul was pursuing David the Philistines were invading *him*; nay, in the cave, when Saul thought David should fall into his hands, he fell into the hands of David, and lay at his mercy.

III. He prays to God to glorify himself and his own great name (v. 5): "*Whatever becomes of me and my interest, be thou exalted, O God! above the heavens*, be thou praised by the holy angels, those glorious inhabitants of the upper world; *and let thy glory be above or over all the earth*; let all the inhabitants of this earth be brought to know and praise thee." Thus God's glory should lie hearer our hearts, and we should be more concerned for it, than for any particular interests of our own. When David was in the greatest distress and disgrace he did not pray, *Lord, exalt me*, but, *Lord, exalt thy own name*. Thus the Son of David, when his soul was troubled, and he prayed, *Father, save me from this hour*, immediately withdrew that petition, and presented this in the room of it, *For this cause came I to this*

hour; Father, glorify thy name, ~~4827~~John 12:27, 28. Or it may be taken as a plea to enforce his petition for deliverance: “Lord, *send from heaven to save me*, and thereby thou wilt glorify thyself as the God both of heaven and earth.” Our best encouragement in prayer is taken from the glory of God, and to that therefore, more than our own comfort, we should have an eye in all our petitions for particular mercies; for this is made the first petition in the Lord's prayer, as that which regulates and directs all the rest, *Father in heaven, hallowed by thy name.*

~~4507~~PSALM 57:7-11

PRAYERS TURNED TO PRAISE

How strangely is the tune altered here! David's prayers and complaints, by the lively actings of faith, are here, all of a sudden, turned into praises and thanksgivings; his sackcloth is loosed, he is girded with gladness, and his hallelujahs are as fervent as his hosannas. This should make us in love with prayer, that, sooner or later, it will be swallowed up in praise. Observe,

I. How he prepares himself for the duty of praise (v. 7): *My heart is fixed, O God! my heart is fixed. My heart is erect, or lifted up* (so some), which was bowed down, v. 6. *My heart is fixed*,

1. With reference to God's providences; it is prepared for every event, being *stayed upon God*, ~~4817~~Psalm 112:7; ~~2363~~Isaiah 26:3. *My heart is fixed*, and then *none of these things move me*, ~~4024~~Acts 20:24. If by the grace of God we be brought into this even composed frame of spirit, we have great reason to be thankful.


2. With reference to the worship of God: *My heart is fixed to sing and give praise*. It is implied that the heart is the main thing required in all acts of devotion; nothing is done to purpose, in religion, further than it is done with the heart. The heart must be fixed, fixed for the duty, fitted and put in frame for it, fixed in the duty by a close application, *attending on the Lord without distraction*.

II. How he excites himself to the duty of praise (v. 8): *Awake up my glory*, that is, my tongue (our tongue is our glory, and never more so than

when it is employed in praising God), or my soul, that must be first awakened; dull and sleepy devotions will never be acceptable to God. We must stir up ourselves, and all that is within us, to praise God; with a holy fire must that sacrifice be kindled, and ascend in a holy flame. David's tongue will lead, and his psaltery and harp will follow, in these hymns of praise. *I myself will awake*, not only, "I will not be dead, and drowsy, and careless, in this work," but, "I will be in the most lively frame, as one newly awakened out of a refreshing sleep." He will awake *early* to this work, early in the morning, to begin the day with God, early in the beginnings of a mercy. When God is coming towards us with his favours we must go forth to meet him with our praises.

III. How he pleases himself, and (as I may say) even prides himself, in the work of praise; so far is he from being ashamed to own his obligations to God, and dependence upon him, that he resolves to *praise him among the people* and to *sing unto him among the nations*, v. 9. This intimates,

1. That his own heart was much affected and enlarged in praising God; he would even make the earth ring with his sacred songs, that all might take notice how much he thought himself indebted to the goodness of God.

2. That he desired to bring others in to join with him in praising God. He will publish God's praises *among the people*, that the knowledge, and fear, and love of God might be propagated, and the ends of the earth might see his salvation. When David was driven out into heathen lands he would not only not worship their gods, but he would openly avow his veneration for the God of Israel, would take his religion along with him wherever he went, would endeavour to bring others in love with it, and leave the sweet savour of it behind him. David, in his psalms, which fill the universal church, and will to the end of time, may be said to be still *praising God among the people* and *singing to him among the nations*; for all good people make use of his words in praising God. Thus St. John, in his writings, is said to *prophesy again before many peoples and nations*,  Revelation 10:11.

IV. How he furnishes himself with matter for praise, v. 10. That which was the matter of his hope and comfort (*God shall send forth his mercy and his truth*, v. 3) is here the matter of his thanksgiving: *Thy mercy is great unto the heavens*, great beyond conception and expression; and *thy truth unto the clouds*, great beyond discovery, for what eye can reach that

which is wrapped up in the clouds? God's mercy and truth reach to the heavens, for they will bring all such to heaven as lay up their treasure in them and build their hopes upon them. God's mercy and truth are praised even to the heavens, that is, by all the bright and blessed inhabitants of the upper world, who are continually exalting God's praises to the highest, while David, on earth, is endeavouring to spread his praises to the furthest, v. 9.

V. How he leaves it at last to God to glorify his own name (v. 11): *Be thou exalted, O God!* The same words which he had used (v. 5) to sum up his prayers in he here uses again (and no vain repetition) to sum up his praises in: “Lord, I desire to exalt thy name, and that all the creatures may exalt it; but what can the best of us do towards it? Lord, take the work into thy own hands; do it thyself: *Be thou exalted, O God!* In the praises of the church triumphant thou art exalted to the heavens, and in the praises of the church militant thy glory is throughout all the earth; but thou art above all the blessing and praise of both (³⁶⁹⁵Nehemiah 9:5), and therefore, Lord, exalt thyself *above the heavens and above all the earth. Father, glorify thy own name. Thou hast glorified it, glorify it yet again.*”