

PSALM 58

It is the probable conjecture of some (Amyraldus particularly) that before Saul began to persecute David by force of arms, and raised the militia to seize him, he formed a process against him by course of law, upon which he was condemned unheard, and attainted as a traitor, by the great council, or supreme court of judicature, and then proclaimed “qui caput gerit lupinum — an outlawed wolf,” whom any man might kill and no man might protect. The elders, in order to curry favour with Saul, having passed this bill of attainder, it is supposed that David penned this psalm on the occasion.

I. He describes their sin, and aggravates that (v. 1-5).

II. He imprecates and foretels their ruin, and the judgments which the righteous God would bring upon them for their injustice (v. 6-9) which would redound,

1. To the comfort of the saints (v. 10).

2. To the glory of God (v. 11). Sin appears here both exceedingly sinful and exceedingly dangerous, and God a just avenger of wrong, with which we should be affected in singing this psalm.

PSALM 58:1-5

A REPROOF TO WICKED JUDGES

To the chief musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David.

We have reason to think that this psalm refers to the malice of Saul and his janizaries against David, because it bears the same inscription (*Al-taschith*, and *Michtam of David*) with that which goes before and that which follows, both which appear, by the title, to have been penned with reference to that persecution through which God preserved him (*Al-taschith — Destroy not*), and therefore the psalms he then penned were precious to him, *Michtams — David's jewels*, as Dr. Hammond translates it.

In these verses David, not as a king, for he had not yet come to the throne, but as a prophet, in God's name arraigns and convicts his judges, with more authority and justice than they showed in prosecuting him. Two things he charges them with:

1. The corruption of their government. They were a congregation, a bench of justices, nay, perhaps, a congress or convention of the states, from whom one might have expected fair dealing, for they were men learned in the laws, had been brought up in the study of these statutes and judgments, which were so righteous that those of other nations were not to be compared with them. One would not have thought a congregation of such could be bribed and biassed with pensions, and yet, it seems, they were, because the son of Kish could do that for them which the son of Jesse could not, ¹⁰²⁷1 Samuel 22:7. He had vineyards, and fields, and preferments, to give them, and therefore, to please him, they would do any thing, right or wrong. Of all the melancholy views which Solomon took of this earth and its grievances, nothing vexed him so much as to see that in the *place of judgment wickedness was there*, ²¹⁸⁶Ecclesiastes 3:16. So it was in Saul's time.

1. The judges would not do right, would not protect or vindicate oppressed innocency (v. 1): *“Do you indeed speak righteousness, or judge uprightly? No; you are far from it; your own consciences cannot but tell you that you do not discharge the trust reposed in you as magistrates, by which you are bound to be a terror to evil-doers and a praise to those that do well. Is this the justice you pretend to administer? Is this the patronage, this the countenance, which an honest man and an honest cause may expect from you? Remember you are sons of men; mortal and dying, and that you stand upon the same level before God with the meanest of those you trample upon, and must yourselves be called to an account and judged. You are sons of men, and therefore we may appeal to yourselves, and to that law of nature which is written in every man's heart: Do you indeed speak righteousness? And will not your second thoughts correct what you have done?”* Note, It is good for us often to reflect upon what we say with this serious question, *Do we indeed speak righteousness?* that we may unsay what we have spoken amiss and may proceed no further in it.

2. They did a great deal of wrong; they used their power for the support of injury and oppression (v. 2): *In heart you work wickedness* (all the wickedness of the life is wrought in the heart). It intimates that they

wrought with a great deal of plot and management, not by surprise, but with premeditation and design, and with a strong inclination to it and resolution in it. The moire there is of the heart in any act of wickedness the worse it is, ²⁹⁸¹Ecclesiastes 8:11. And what was their wickedness? It follows, “*You weigh the violence of your hands in the earth*” (or *in the land*), “the peace of which you are appointed to be the conservators of.” They did all the violence and injury they could, either to enrich or avenge themselves, and they weighed it; that is,

(1.) They did it with a great deal of craft and caution: “*You frame it by rule and lines*” (so the word signifies), “that it may effectually answer your mischievous intentions; such masters are you of the art of oppression.”

(2.) They did it under colour of justice. They held the balances (the emblem of justice) in their hands, as if they designed to do right, and right is expected from them, but the result is violence and oppression, which are practised the more effectually for being practised under the pretext of law and right.

II. The corruption of their nature. This was the root of bitterness from which that gall and wormwood sprang (v. 3): *The wicked, who in heart work wickedness, are estranged from the womb*, estranged from God and all good, *alienated from the divine life*, and its principles, powers, and pleasures, ⁴⁰⁸⁵Ephesians 4:18. A sinful state is a state of estrangement from that acquaintance with God and service of him which we were made for. Let none wonder that these wicked men dare do such things, for wickedness is bred in the bone with them; they brought it into the world with them; they have in their natures a strong inclination to it; they learned it from their wicked parents, and have been trained up in it by a bad education. They are called, and not miscalled, *transgressors from the womb*; one can therefore expect no other than that they will *deal very treacherously*; see ²³⁸⁵Isaiah 48:8. They go astray from God and their duty as soon as they are born, (that is, as soon as possibly they can); the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts appears with the first operations of reason; as the wheat springs up, the tares spring up with it. Three instances are here given of the corruption of nature: —

1. Falsehood. They soon learn to speak lies, and *bend their tongues, like their bows*, for that purpose, ⁴⁹⁰³Jeremiah 9:3. How soon will little children

tell a lie to excuse a fault, or in their own commendation! No sooner can they speak than they speak to God's dishonour; tongue-sins are some of the first of our actual transgressions.

2. Malice. *Their poison* (that is, their ill-will, and the spite they bore to goodness and all good men, particularly to David) was *like the poison of a serpent*, innate, venomous, and very mischievous, and that which they can never be cured of. We pity a dog that is poisoned by accident, but hate a serpent that is poisonous by nature. Such as the cursed enmity in this serpent's brood against the Lord and his anointed.

3. Untractableness. They are malicious, and nothing will work upon them, no reason, no kindness, to mollify them, and bring them to a better temper. *They are like the deaf adder that stops her ear*, v. 4, 5. The psalmist, having compared these wicked men, whom he here complains of, to serpents, for their poisonous malice, takes occasion thence, upon another account, to compare them to the deaf adder or viper, concerning which there was then this vulgar tradition, that whereas, by music or some other art, they had a way of charming serpents, so as either to destroy them or at least disable them to do mischief, this deaf adder would lay one ear to the ground and stop the other with her tail, so that she could not hear the voice of the enchantment, and so defeated the intention of it and secured herself. The using of this comparison neither verifies the story, nor, if it were true, justifies the use of this enchantment; for it is only an allusion to the report of such a thing, to illustrate the obstinacy of sinners in a sinful way. God's design, in his word and providence, is to cure serpents of their malignity; to this end how wise, how powerful, how well-chosen are the charms! How forcible the right words! But all in vain with most men; and what is the reason? It is because they will not hearken. None so deaf as those that will not hear. *We have piped unto men, and they have not danced*; how should they, when they have stopped their ears?

~~1806~~ PSALM 58:6-11

PROPHETIC IMPRECATIONS

In these verses we have,

I. David's prayers against his enemies, and all the enemies of God's church and people; for it is as such that he looks upon them, so that he was actuated by a public spirit in praying against them, and not by any private revenge.

1. He prays that they might be disabled to do any further mischief (v. 6): *Break their teeth, O God!* Not so much that they might not feed themselves as that they might not be able to make prey of others, ^{<BIB>}Psalm 3:7. He does not say, "Break their necks" (no; let them live to repent, *slay them not, lest my people forget*), but, "Break their teeth, for they are lions, they are young lions, that live by rapine."

2. That they might be disappointed in the plots they had already laid, and might not gain their point: "*When he bends his bow, and takes aim to shoot his arrows at the upright in heart, let them be as cut in pieces*, v. 7. Let them fall at his feet, and never come near the mark."

3. That they and their interest might waste and come to nothing, that they might *melt away as waters that run continually*; that is, as the waters of a land-flood, which, though they seem formidable for a while, soon soak into the ground or return to their channels, or, in general, as *water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again*, but gradually dries away and disappears. Such shall the *floods of ungodly men* be, which sometimes *make us afraid* (^{<BIB>}Psalm 18:4); so shall the proud waters be reduced, which threaten to go over our soul, ^{<BIB>}Psalm 124:4, 5. Let us by faith then see what they shall be and then we shall not fear what they are. He prays (v. 8) that they might *melt as a snail*, which wastes by its own motion, in every stretch it makes leaving some of its moisture behind, which, by degrees, must needs consume it, though it makes a path to shine after it. He that like a snail in her house is *plenus sui* — *full of himself*, that pleases himself and trusts to himself, does but consume himself, and will quickly bring himself to nothing. And he prays that they might be *like the untimely birth of a woman*, which dies as soon as it begins to live and never *sees the sun*. Job, in his passion, wished he himself had been such a one (^{<BIB>}Job 3:16), but he knew not what he said. We may, in faith, pray against the designs of the church's enemies, as the prophet does (^{<BIB>}Hosea 9:14, *Give them, O Lord! what wilt thou give them? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts*), which explains this prayer of the psalmist.

II. His prediction of their ruin (v. 9): “*Before your pots can feel the heat of a fire of thorns made under them (which they will presently do, for it is a quick fire and violent while it lasts), so speedily, with such a hasty and violent flame, God shall hurry them away, as terribly and as irresistibly as with a whirlwind, as it were alive, as it were in fury.*”

1. The proverbial expressions are somewhat difficult, but the sense is plain,

(1.) That the judgments of God often surprise wicked people in the midst of their jollity, and hurry them away of a sudden. When they are beginning to walk in the light of their own fire, and the sparks of their own kindling, they are made to *lie down in sorrow* (^{<2811>}Isaiah 50:11), and their laughter proves like the crackling of thorns under a pot, the comfort of which is soon gone, ere they can say, *Alas! I am warm,* ^{<2106>}Ecclesiastes 7:6.

(2.) That there is no standing before the destruction that comes from the Almighty; for *who knows the power of God's anger?* When God will take sinners away, dead or alive, they cannot contest with him. *The wicked are driven away in their wickedness.* Now,

2. There are two things which the psalmist promises himself as the good effects of sinners' destruction: —

(1.) That saints would be encouraged and comforted by it (v. 10): *The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance.* The pomp and power, the prosperity and success, of the wicked, are a discouragement to the righteous; they sadden their hearts, and weaken their hands, and are sometimes a strong temptation to them to question their foundations, ^{<591>}Psalms 73:2, 13. But when they see the judgments of God hurrying them away, and just vengeance taken on them for all the mischief they have done to the people of God, they rejoice in the satisfaction thereby given to their doubts and the confirmation thereby given to their faith in the providence of God and his justice and righteousness in governing the world; they shall rejoice in the victory thus gained over that temptation by seeing *their end,* ^{<5917>}Psalms 73:17. *He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked;* that is, there shall be abundance of bloodshed (^{<4823>}Psalms 68:23), and it shall be as great a refreshment to the saints to see God glorified in the ruin of sinners as it is to a weary traveller to have his feet washed. It shall likewise contribute to their sanctification; the sight of the vengeance shall make them tremble before God (^{<5810>}Psalms 119:120) and shall

convince them of the evil of sin, and the obligations they lie under to that God who pleads their cause and will suffer no man to do them wrong and go unpunished for it. The joy of the saints in the destruction of the wicked is then a holy joy, and justifiable, when it helps to make them holy and to purify them from sin.

(2.) That sinners would be convinced and converted by it, v. 11. The vengeance God sometimes takes on the wicked in this world will bring men to say, *Verily, there is a reward for the righteous*. Any man may draw this inference from such providences, and many a man shall, who before denied even these plain truths or doubted of them. Some shall have this confession extorted from them, others shall have their minds so changed that they shall willingly own it, and thank God who has given them to see it and see it with satisfaction, That God is, and,

[1.] That he is the bountiful rewarder of his saints and servants: *Verily (however it be, so it may be read) there is a fruit to the righteous*; whatever damage he may run, and whatever hardship he may undergo for his religion, he shall not only be no loser by it, but an unspeakable gainer in the issue. Even in this world there is a reward for the righteous; they shall be recompensed in the earth. Those shall be taken notice of, honoured, and protected, that seemed slighted, despised, and abandoned.

[2.] That he is the righteous governor of the world, and will surely reckon with the enemies of his kingdom: *Verily, however it be, though wicked people prosper, and bid defiance to divine justice, yet it shall be made to appear, to their confusion, that the world is not governed by chance, but by a Being of infinite wisdom and justice; there is a God that judges in the earth*, though he has prepared his throne in the heavens. He presides in all the affairs of the children of men, and directs and disposes them according to the counsel of his will, to his own glory; and he will punish the wicked, not only in the world to come, but *in the earth*, where they have laid up their treasure and promised themselves a happiness — *in the earth*, that the Lord may be known by the judgments which he executes, and that they may be taken as earnest of a judgment to come. *He is a God* (so we read it), not a weak man, not an angel, not a mere name, not (as the atheists suggest) a creature of men's fear and fancy, not a deified hero, not the sun and moon, as idolaters imagined, but a God, a self-existent perfect Being; he it is that judges the earth; his favour therefore let us seek, from whom every man's judgment proceeds, and to him let all judgment be referred.