

PSALM 143

This psalm, as those before, is a prayer of David, and full of complaints of the great distress and danger he was in, probably when Saul persecuted him. He did not only pray in that affliction, but he prayed very much and very often, not the same over again, but new thoughts. In this psalm,

I. He complains of his troubles, through the oppression of his enemies (v. 3) and the weakness of his spirit under it, which was ready to sink notwithstanding the likely course he took to support himself (v. 4, 5).

II. He prays, and prays earnestly (v. 6),

- 1.** That God would hear him (v. 1-7).
- 2.** That he would not deal with him according to his sins (v. 2).
- 3.** That he would not hide his face from him (v. 7), but manifest his favour to him (v. 8).
- 4.** That he would guide and direct him in the way of his duty (v. 8, 10) and quicken him in it (v. 11).
- 5.** That he would deliver him out of his troubles (v. 9, 11).
- 6.** That he would in due time reckon with his persecutors (v. 12). We may more easily accommodate this psalm to ourselves, in the singing of it, because most of the petitions in it are for spiritual blessings (which we all need at all times), mercy and grace.

⌘ PSALM 143:1-6

COMPLAINTS AND PETITIONS

A psalm of David.

Here,

I. David humbly begs to be heard (v. 1), not as if he questioned it, but he earnestly desired it, and was in care about it, for, having desired it, and was in care about it, for having directed his prayer, he looked up to see how it sped, ⌘ Habakkuk 2:1. He is a suppliant to his God, and he begs

that his requests may be granted: *Hear my prayer; give ear to my supplications*. He is an appellant against his persecutors, and he begs that his case may be brought to hearing and that God will give judgment upon it, in his faithfulness and righteousness, as the Judge of right and wrong. Or, “Answer my petitions in thy faithfulness, according to the promises thou hast made, which thou wilt be just to.” We have no righteousness of our own to plead, and therefore must plead God's righteousness, the word of promise which he has freely given us and caused us to hope in.

II. He humbly begs not to be proceeded against in strict justice, v. 2. He seems here, if not to correct, yet to explain, his plea (v. 1), *Deliver me in thy righteousness*; “I mean,” says he, “the righteous promises of the gospel, not the righteous threatenings of the law; if I be answered according to the righteousness of this broken covenant of innocency, I am quite undone;” and therefore,

1. His petition is, “*Enter not into judgment with thy servant*; do not deal with me in strict justice, as I deserve to be dealt with.” In this prayer we must own ourselves to be God's servants, bound to obey him, accountable to him, and solicitous to obtain his favour, and we must approve ourselves to him. We must acknowledge that in many instances we have offended him, and have come short of our duty to him, that he might justly enquire into our offences, and proceed against us for them according to law, and that, if he should do so, judgment would certainly go against us; we have nothing to move in arrest or mitigation of it, but execution would be taken out and awarded and then we should be ruined for ever. But we must encourage ourselves with a hope that there is mercy and forgiveness with God, and be earnest with him for the benefit of that mercy. “*Enter not into judgment with thy servant*, for thou hast already entered into judgment with thy Son, and laid upon him the iniquity of us all. *Enter not into judgment with thy servant*, for thy servant enters into judgment with himself;” and, if *we will judge ourselves, we shall not be judged*.

2. His plea is, “*In thy sight shall no man living be justified upon those terms, for no man can plead innocency nor any righteousness of his own, either that he has not sinned or that he does not deserve to die for his sins; nor that he has any satisfaction of his own to offer;*” nay, if God contend with us, *we are not able to answer him for one of a thousand*, ^{<390>}Job 9:3; 15:20. David, before he prays for the removal of his trouble, prays for the pardon of his sin, and depends upon mere mercy for it.

III. He complains of the prevalency of his enemies against him (v. 3): “Saul, that great enemy, *has persecuted my soul*, sought my life, with a restless malice, and has carried the persecution so far that he has already *smitten it down to the ground*. Though I am not yet under ground, I am struck to the ground, and that is next door to it; he has forced me to *dwell in darkness*, not only in dark caves, but in dark thoughts and apprehensions, in the clouds of melancholy, *as helpless and hopeless as those that have been long dead*. Lord, let me find mercy with thee, for I find no mercy with men. They condemn me; but, Lord, do not thou condemn me. Am not I an object of thy compassion, fit to be appeared for; and is not my enemy an object of thy displeasure, fit to be appeared against?”

IV. He bemoans the oppression of his mind, occasioned by his outward troubles (v. 4): *Therefore is my spirit overpowered and overwhelmed within me*, and I am almost plunged in despair; when without are fightings within are fears, and those fears greater tyrants and oppressors than Saul himself and not so easily out-run. It is sometimes the lot of the best men to have their spirits for a time almost overwhelmed and their hearts desolate, and doubtless it is their infirmity. David was not only a great saint, but a great soldier, and yet even he was sometimes ready to faint in a day of adversity. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be shaken*.

V. He applies himself to the use of proper means for the relief of his troubled spirit. He had no force to muster up against the oppression of the enemy, but, if he can keep possession of nothing else, he will do what he can to keep possession of his own soul and to preserve his inward peace. In order to this,

- 1.** He looks back, and *remembers the days of old* (v. 5), God's former appearances for his afflicted people and for him in particular. It has been often a relief to the people of God in their straits to think of the wonders which their fathers told them of, ^{<975>}Psalm 77:5, 11.
- 2.** He looks round, and takes notice of the works of God in the visible creation, and the providential government of the world: *I meditate on all thy works*. Many see them, but do not see the footsteps of God's wisdom, power, and goodness in them, and do not receive the benefit they might by them because they do not meditate upon them; they do not dwell on that copious curious subject, but soon quit it, as if they had exhausted it, when

they have scarcely touched upon it. *I muse on*, or (as some read it) *I discourse of*, the operation of thy hands, how great, how good, it is! The more we consider the power of God the less we shall fear the face or force of man, ^{<2812>}Isaiah 51:12, 13.

3. He looks up with earnest desires towards God and his favour (v. 6): “*I stretch forth my hands unto thee*, as one begging an alms, and big with expectation to receive something great, standing ready to lay hold on it and bid it welcome. *My soul thirsteth after thee; it is to thee* (so the word is), entire for thee, intent on thee; it is *as a thirsty land*, which, being parched with excessive heat, gapes for rain; so do I need, so do I crave, the support and refreshment of divine consolations under my afflictions, and nothing else will relieve me.” This is the best course we can take when our spirits are overwhelmed; and justly do those sink under their load who will not take such a ready way as this to ease themselves.

~~<4812>~~ PSALM 143:7-12

PRAYERS FOR DIVINE GRACE

David here tells us what he said when he stretched forth his hands unto God; he begins not only as one in earnest, but as one in haste: “*Hear me speedily*, and defer no longer, *for my spirit faileth*. I am just ready to faint; reach the cordial — quickly, quickly, or I am gone.” It was not a haste of unbelief, but of vehement desire and holy love. *Make haste, O God! to help me*. Three things David here prays for: —

I. The manifestations of God's favour towards him, that God would be well pleased with him and let him know that he was so; this he prefers before any good, ^{<1046>}Psalms 4:6.

1. He dreads God's frowns: “Lord, *hide not thy face from me*; Lord, be not angry with me, do not turn from me, as we do from one we are displeased with; Lord, let me not be left under the apprehensions of thy anger or in doubt concerning thy favour; if I have thy favour, let it not be hidden from me.” Those that have the truth of grace cannot but desire the evidence of it. He pleads the wretchedness of his case if God withdrew from him: “Lord, let me not lie under thy wrath, for then I am *like those that go down to the pit*, that is, down to the grave (I am a dead man, weak, and pale, and

ghastly; thy frowns are worse than death), or down to hell, the bottomless pit.” Even those who through grace are delivered from going down to the pit may sometimes, when the terrors of the Almighty set themselves in array against them, look like those who are going to the pit. Disconsolate saints have sometimes cried out of the wrath of God, as if they had been damned sinners, ^{<3864>}Job 6:4; ^{<3865>}Psalm 88:6.

2. He entreats God's favour (v. 8): *Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning.* He cannot but think that God has a kindness for him, that he has some kind things to say to him, some good words and comfortable words; but the present hurry of his affairs, and tumult of his spirits, drowned those pleasing whispers; and therefore he begs, “Lord, do not only speak kindly to me, but cause me to hear it, to *hear joy and gladness,*” ^{<4518>}Psalm 51:8. God speaks to us by his word and by his providence, and in both we should desire and endeavour to *hear his lovingkindness* (^{<4478>}Psalm 107:43), that we may set that always before us: “*Cause me to hear it in the morning,* every morning; let my waking thoughts be of God's lovingkindness, that the sweet relish of that may abide upon my spirits all the day long.” His plea is, “*For in thee do I trust,* and in thee only; I look not for comfort in any other.” God's goodness is commonly wrought *for those who trust in him* (^{<3808>}Psalm 31:8), who by faith draw it out.

II. The operations of God's grace in him. Those he is as earnest for as for the tokens of God's favour to him, and so should we be. He prays,

1. That he might be enlightened with the knowledge of God's will; and this is the first work of the Spirit, in order to his other works, for God deals with men as men, as reasonable creatures. Here are three petitions to this effect: —

(1.) *Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk.* Sometimes those that are much in care to walk right are in doubt, and in the dark, which is the right way. Let them come boldly to the throne of grace, and beg of God, by his word, and Spirit, and providence, to show them the way, and prevent their missing it. A good man does not ask what is the way in which he must walk, or in which is the most pleasant walking, but what is the right way, the way in which he should walk. He pleads, “*I lift up my soul unto thee,* to be moulded and fashioned according to thy will.” He did

not only importunately, but impartially, desire to know his duty; and those that do so shall be taught.

(2.) “*Teach me to do thy will*, not only show me what thy will is, but teach me how to do it, how to turn my hand dexterously to my duty.” It is the desire and endeavour of all God’s faithful servants to know and to do his will, and to stand complete in it. He pleads, “*Thou art my God*, and therefore my oracle, by whom I may expect to be advised — my God, and therefore my ruler, whose will I desire to do.” If we do in sincerity take God for our God, we may depend upon him to teach us to do his will, as a master does his servant.

(3.) *Lead me into the land of uprightness*, into the communion of saints, that pleasant land of the upright, or into a settled course of holy living, which will lead to heaven, that land of uprightness where holiness will be in perfection, and he that is holy shall be holy still. We should desire to be led, and kept safe, to heaven, not only because it is a land of blessedness, but because it is a land of uprightness; it is the perfection of grace. We cannot find the way that will bring us to that land unless God show us, nor go in that way unless he take us by the hand and lead us, as we lead those that are weak, or lame, or timorous, or dim-sighted; so necessary is the grace of God, not only to put us into the good way, but to keep us and carry us on in it. The plea is, “*Thy Spirit is good*, and able to make me good,” good and willing to help those that are at a loss. Those that have the Lord for their God have his Spirit for their guide; and it is both their character and their privilege that they are *led by the Spirit*.

2. He prays that he might be enlivened to do his will (v. 11): “*Quicken me, O Lord!* — quicken my devotions, that they may be lively; quicken me to my duty, and quicken me in it; and this *for thy name’s sake*.” The best saints often find themselves dull, and dead, and slow, and therefore pray to God to quicken them.

III. The appearance of God’s providence for him,

1. That God would, in his own way and time, give him rest from his troubles (v. 9): “*Deliver me, O Lord! from my enemies*, that they may not have their will against me; *for I flee unto thee to hide me*; I trust to thee to defend me in my trouble, and therefore to rescue me out of it.”

Preservations are pledges of salvation, and those shall find God their hiding-place who by faith make him such. He explains himself (v. 11):

“For thy righteousness-sake, bring my soul out of trouble, for thy promise-sake, nay, for thy mercy-sake” (for some by *righteousness* understand *kindness* and *goodness*); “do not only deliver me from my outward trouble, but from the trouble of my soul, the trouble that threatens to overwhelm my spirit. Whatever trouble I am in, Lord, let not my heart be troubled,” ⁴¹¹John 14:1.

2. That he would reckon with those that were the instruments of his trouble (v. 12): “Of thy mercy to me *cut off my enemies*, that I may be no longer in fear of them; *and destroy all those*, whoever they be, how numerous, how powerful, soever, *who afflict my soul*, and create vexation to that; *for I am thy servant*, and am resolved to continue such, and therefore may expect to be owned and protected in thy service.” This prayer is a prophecy of the utter destruction of all the impenitent enemies of Jesus Christ and his kingdom, who will not have him to reign over them, who grieve his Spirit, and afflict his soul, by afflicting his people, in whose afflictions he is afflicted.