

PSALM 5

The psalm is a prayer, a solemn address to God, at a time when the psalmist was brought into distress by the malice of his enemies. Many such times passed over David, nay, there was scarcely any time of his life to which this psalm may not be accommodated, for in this he was a type of Christ, that he was continually beset with enemies, and his powerful and prevalent appeals to God, when he was so beset, pointed at Christ's dependence on his Father and triumphs over the powers of darkness in the midst of his sufferings. In this psalm,

I. David settles a correspondence between his soul and God, promising to pray, and promising himself that God would certainly hear him (v. 1-3).

II. He gives to God the glory, and takes to himself the comfort, of God's holiness (v. 4-6).

III. He declares his resolution to keep close to the public worship of God (v. 7).

IV. He prayed,

1. For himself, that God would guide him, (v. 8).
2. Against his enemies, that God would destroy them (v. 9, 10).
3. For all the people of God, that God would give them joy, and keep them safe (v. 11, 12). And this is all of great use to direct us in prayer.

PSALM 5:1-6

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE AND PROTECTION

To the chief musician upon Nehiloth. A psalm of David.

The title of this psalm has nothing in it peculiar but that it is said to be upon *Nehiloth*, a word nowhere else used. It is conjectured (and it is but a conjecture) that it signifies *wind*-instruments, with which this psalm was sung, as *Neginoth* was supposed to signify the *stringed*-instruments. In these verses David had an eye to God,

I. As a prayer-hearing God; such he has always been ever since men began to call upon the name of the Lord, and yet is still as ready to hear prayer as ever. Observe how David here styles him: *O Lord* (v. 1, 3), *Jehovah*, a self-existent, self-sufficient, Being, whom we are bound to adore, and, “*my King and my God* (v. 2), whom I have avouched for my God, to whom I have sworn allegiance, and under whose protection I have put myself as my King.” We believe that the God we pray to is a King, and a God. King of kings and God of gods; but that is not enough: the most commanding encouraging principle of prayer, and the most powerful or prevailing plea in prayer, is to look upon him as *our King and our God*, to whom we lie under peculiar obligations and from whom we have peculiar expectations. Now observe,

1. What David here prays for, which may encourage our faith and hopes in all our addresses to God. If we pray fervently, and in faith, we have reason to hope,

(1.) That God will take cognizance of our case, the representation we make of it and the requests we make upon it; for so he prays here: *Give ear to my words, O Lord!* Though God is in heaven, he has an ear open to his people's prayers, and it is not heavy, that he cannot hear. Men perhaps will not or cannot hear us; our enemies are so haughty that they will not, our friends at such a distance that they cannot; but God, though high, though in heaven, can, and will.

(2.) That he will take it into his wise and compassionate consideration, and will not slight it, or turn it off with a cursory answer; for so he prays: *Consider my meditation.* David's prayers were not his words only, but his meditations; as meditation is the best preparative for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation. Meditation and prayer should go together, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 19:14. It is when we thus consider our prayers, and then only, that we may expect that God will consider them, and take that to his heart which comes from ours.

(3.) That he will, in due time, return a gracious answer of peace; for so he prays (v. 2): *Hearken to the voice of my cry.* His prayer was a *cry*; it was *the voice of his cry*, which denotes fervency of affection and importunity of expression; and such effectual fervent prayers of a righteous man avail much and do wonders.

2. What David here promises, as the condition on his part to be performed, fulfilled, and kept, that he might obtain this gracious acceptance; this may guide and govern us in our addresses to God, that we may present them aright, for we ask, and have not, if we ask amiss. Four things David here promises, and so must we: —

(1.) That he will pray, that he will make conscience of praying, and make a business of it: *Unto thee will I pray*. “Others live without prayer, but I will pray.” Kings on their own thrones (so David was) must be beggars at God’s throne. “Others pray to strange gods, and expect relief from them, but to thee, to thee only, will I pray.” The assurances God has given us of his readiness to hear prayer should confirm our resolution to live and die praying.

(2.) That he will pray *in the morning*. His praying voice shall be heard then, and then shall his prayer be directed; that shall be the date of his letters to heaven, not that only (“Morning, and evening, and at noon, will I pray, nay, seven times a day, will I praise thee”), but that certainly. Morning prayer is our duty; we are the fittest for prayer when we are in the most fresh, and lively, and composed frame, got clear of the slumbers of the night, revived by them, and not yet filled with the business of the day. We have then most need of prayer, considering the dangers and temptations of the day to which we are exposed, and against which we are concerned; by faith and prayer, to fetch in fresh supplies of grace.

(3.) That he will have his eye single and his heart intent in the duty: *I will direct my prayer*, as a marksman directs his arrow to the white; with such a fixedness and steadiness of mind should we address ourselves to God. Or as we direct a letter to a friend at such a place so must we direct our prayers to God as our Father in heaven; and let us always send them by the Lord Jesus, the great Mediator, and then they will be sure not to miscarry. All our prayers must be directed to God; his honour and glory must be aimed at as our highest end in all our prayers. Let our first petition be, *Hallowed, glorified, by thy name*, and then we may be sure of the same gracious answer to it that was given to Christ himself: *I have glorified it, and I will glorify it yet again*.

(4.) That he will patiently wait for an answer of peace: “*I will look up, will look after my prayers, and hear what God the Lord will speak* (^{398B} Psalm 85:8; ^{391E} Habakkuk 2:1), that, if he grant what I asked, I may be thankful — if he deny, I may be patient — if he defer, I may continue to pray and

wait and may not faint.” We must look *up*, or look *out*, as he that has shot an arrow looks to see how near it has come to the mark. We lose much of the comfort of our prayers for want of observing the returns of them. Thus praying, thus waiting, as the lame man looked stedfastly on Peter and John (~~408~~ Acts 3:4), we may expect that God will give ear to our words and consider them, and to him we may refer ourselves, as David here, who does not pray, “Lord, do this, or the other, for me;” but, “Hearken to me, consider my case, and do in it as seemeth good unto thee.”

II. As a sin-hating God, v. 4-6. David takes notice of this,

1. As a warning to himself, and all other praying people, to remember that, as the God with whom we have to do is gracious and merciful, so he is pure and holy; though he is ready to hear prayer, yet, if we regard iniquity in our heart, he will not hear our prayers, ~~408~~ Psalm 66:18.

2. As an encouragement to his prayers against his enemies; they were wicked men, and therefore enemies to God, and such as he had not pleasure in. See here.

(1.) The holiness of God's nature. When he says, *Thou art not a God that has pleasure in wickedness*, he means, “Thou art a God that hates it, as directly contrary to thy infinite purity and rectitude, and holy will.” Though the workers of iniquity prosper, let none thence infer that God has pleasure in wickedness, no, not in that by which men pretend to honour him, as those do that hate their brethren, and cast them out, and say, *Let the Lord be glorified*. God has no pleasure in wickedness, though covered with a cloak of religion. Let those therefore who delight in sin know that God has no delight in them; nor let any say, when he is tempted, *I am tempted of God*, for God is not the author of sin, neither *shall evil dwell with him*, that is, it shall not always be countenanced and suffered to prosper. Dr. Hammond thinks this refers to that law of Moses which would not permit strangers, who persisted in their idolatry, to dwell in the land of Israel.

(2.) The justice of his government. The foolish *shall not stand in his sight*, that is, shall not be smiled upon by him, nor admitted to attend upon him, nor shall they be acquitted in the judgment of the great day. The workers of iniquity are very foolish. Sin is folly, and sinners are the greatest of all fools; not fools of God's making (those are to be pitied), for he hates nothing that he has made, but fools of their own making, and those he

hates. Wicked people hate God; justly therefore are they hated of him, and it will be their endless misery and ruin. “Those whom thou hatest thou shalt destroy;” particularly two sorts of sinners, who are here marked for destruction: —

[1.] Those that are fools, that speak leasing or lying, and that are deceitful. There is a particular emphasis laid on these sinners (~~618~~ Revelation 21:8), *All liars*, and (~~425~~ Psalm 22:15), *Whosoever loves and makes a lie*; nothing is more contrary than this, and therefore nothing more hateful to the God of truth.

[2.] Those that are cruel: *Thou wilt abhor the bloody man*; for inhumanity is no less contrary, no less hateful, to the God of mercy, whom mercy pleases. Liars and murderers are in a particular manner said to resemble the devil and to be his children, and therefore it may well be expected that God should abhor them. These were the characters of David's enemies; and such as these are still the enemies of Christ and his church, men perfectly lost to all virtue and honour; and the worse they are the surer we may be of their ruin in due time.

In singing these verses, and praying them over, we must engage and stir up ourselves to the duty of prayer, and encourage ourselves in it, because we shall not seek the Lord in vain; and must express our detestation of sin, and our awful expectation of that day of Christ's appearing which will be the day of the perdition of ungodly men.

~~THE~~ PSALM 5:7-12

DELIGHT IN PUBLIC WORSHIP

In these verses David gives three characters — of himself, of his enemies, and of all the people of God, and subjoins a prayer to each of them.

I. He gives an account of himself and prays for himself, v. 7, 8.

1. He is stedfastly resolved to keep closely to God and to his worship. Sinners go away from God, and so make themselves odious to his holiness and obnoxious to his justice: “*But, as for me*, that shall not keep me from thee.” God's holiness and justice are so far from being a terror to the

upright in heart, to drive them from God, that they are rather by them invited to cleave to him. David resolves,

(1.) To worship God, to pay his homage to him, and give unto God the glory due unto his name.

(2.) To worship him publicly: *“I will come into thy house, the courts of thy house, to worship there with other faithful worshippers.”* David was much in secret worship, prayed often alone (v. 2, 3), and yet was very constant and devout in his attendance on the sanctuary. The duties of the closet are designed to prepare us for, not to excuse us from, public ordinances.

(3.) To worship him reverently and with a due sense of the infinite distance there is between God and man: *“In thy fear will I worship, with a holy awe of God upon my spirit,”* ^{<3128>} Hebrews 12:28. God is greatly to be feared by all his worshippers.

(4.) To take his encouragement, in worship, from God himself only.

[1.] From his infinite mercy. It is in the multitude of God's mercy (the inexhaustible treasures of mercy that are in God and the innumerable proofs and instances of it which we receive from him) that David confides, and not in any merit or righteousness of his own, in his approaches to God. The mercy of God should ever be both the foundation of our hopes and the fountain of our joy in every thing wherein we have to do with him.

[2.] From the instituted medium of worship, which was then the temple, here called *the temple of his holiness*, as a type of Christ, the great and only Mediator, who sanctifies the service as the temple sanctified the gold, and to whom we must have an eye in all our devotions as the worshippers then had to the temple.

2. He earnestly prays that God, by his grace, would guide and preserve him always in the way of his duty (v. 8): *Lead me in thy righteousness, because of my enemies* — Hebrews *“Because of those who observe me, who watch for my halting and seek occasion against me.”* See here,

(1.) The good use which David made of the malice of his enemies against him. The more curious they were in spying faults in him, that they might have whereof to accuse him, the more cautious he was to avoid sin and all appearances of it, and the more solicitous to be always found in the good

way of God and duty. Thus, by wisdom and grace, good may come out of evil.

(2.) The right course which David took for the baffling of those who sought occasion against him. He committed himself to a divine guidance, begged of God both by his providence and by his grace to direct him in the right way, and keep him from turning aside out of it, at any time, in any instance whatsoever, that the most critical and captious of his enemies, like Daniel's, might find no occasion against him. The way of our duty is here called *God's way*, and *his righteousness*, because he prescribes to us by his just and holy laws, which if we sincerely set before us as our rule, we may in faith beg of God to direct us in all particular cases. How this prayer of David's was answered to him see ~~OR4~~ 1 Samuel 18:14, 15.

II. He gives an account of his enemies, and prays against them, v. 9, 10.

1. If his account of them is true, as no doubt it is, they have a very bad character; and, if they had not been bad men indeed, they could not have been enemies to a man after God's own heart. He had spoken (v. 6) of God's hating the bloody and deceitful man. "Now, Lord," says he, "that is the character of my enemies: they are deceitful; there is no trusting them, for there is no faithfulness in their mouth." They thought it was no sin to tell a deliberate lie if it might but blemish David, and render him odious. "Lord, lead me," says he (v. 8), "for such as these are the men I have to do with, against whose slanders innocency itself is no security. Do they speak fair? Do they talk of peace and friendship? *They flatter with their tongues*; it is designed to cover their malice, and to gain their point the more securely. Whatever they pretend of religion or friendship, two sacred things, they are true to neither: *Their inward part is wickedness* itself; it is *very wickedness*. They are likewise bloody; for *their throat is an open sepulchre*, cruel as the grave, gaping to devour and to swallow up, insatiable as the grave, which never says, *It is enough*," ~~AR5~~ Proverbs 30:15, 16. This is quoted (~~AR3~~ Romans 3:13) to show the general corruption of mankind; for they are all naturally prone to malice, ~~AR3~~ Titus 3:3. The grave is opened for them all, and yet they are as open graves to one another.

2. If his prayer against them is heard, as no doubt it is, they are in a bad condition. As men are, and do, so they must expect to fare. He prays to God to destroy them (according to what he had said v. 6, "Thou shalt

destroy men of this character,” so *let them fall*; and sinners would soon throw themselves into ruin if they were let alone), to *cast them out* of his protection and favour, out of the heritage of the Lord, out of the land of the living; and woe to those whom God casts out. “They have by their sins deserved destruction; there is enough to justify God in their utter rejection: *Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions*, by which they have filled up the measure of their iniquity and have become ripe for ruin.” Persecuting God's servants fills the measure as soon as any thing, ^{<5175>}1 Thessalonians 2:15, 16. Nay, they may be easily made to *fall by their own counsels*; that which they do to secure themselves, and do mischief to others, by the over-ruling providence of God may be made a means of their destruction, ^{<5175>}Psalm 7:15; 9:15. He pleads, “*They have rebelled against thee*. Had they been only my enemies, I could safely have forgiven them; but they are rebels against God, his crown and dignity; they oppose his government, and will not repent, to give him glory, and therefore I plainly foresee their ruin.” His prayer for their destruction comes not from a spirit of revenge, but from a spirit of prophecy, by which he foretold that all who rebel against God will certainly be destroyed by their own counsels. If it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those that trouble his people, as we are told it is (^{<5106>}2 Thessalonians 1:6), we pray that it may be done whenever we pray, *Father, thy will be done*.

III. He gives an account of the people of God, and prays for them, concluding with an assurance of their bliss, which he doubted not of his own interest in. Observe,

1. The description he gives of God's people. They are the righteous (v. 12); for they *put their trust in God*, are well assured of his power and all-sufficiency, venture their all upon his promise, and are confident of his protection in the way of their duty; and they *love his name*, are well pleased with all that by which God has made himself known, and take delight in their acquaintance with him. This is true and pure religion, to live a life of complacency in God and dependence on him.

2. His prayer for them: “*Let them rejoice*; let them have cause to rejoice and hearts to rejoice; fill them with joy, with great joy and unspeakable; let them shout for joy, with constant joy and perpetual; *let them ever shout for joy*, with holy joy, and that which terminates in God; *let them be joyful in thee*, in thy favour, in thy salvation, not in any creature. Let them rejoice *because thou defendest them*, coverest them, or overshadowest them,

dwellst among them.” Perhaps here is an allusion to the pillar of cloud and fire, which was to Israel a visible token of God's special presence with them and the special protection they were under. Let us learn of David to pray, not for ourselves only, but for others, for all good people, for all that trust in God and love his name, though not in every thing of our mind nor in our interest. Let all that are entitled to God's promises have a share in our prayers; grace be with all that love Christ in sincerity. This is to concur with God.

3. His comfort concerning them, v. 12. He takes them into his prayers because they are God's peculiar people; therefore he doubts not but his prayers shall be heard, and they shall always rejoice; for,

(1.) They are happy in the assurance of God's blessing: *“Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous, wilt command a blessing upon them. Thou hast in thy word pronounced them blessed, and therefore wilt make them truly so. Those whom thou blessest are blessed indeed.”*

(2.) “They are safe under the protection of thy favour; with that thou wilt crown him” (so some read it); “it is his honour, will be to him a diadem of beauty, and make him truly great: with that thou wilt compass him, wilt surround him, on every side, *as with a shield.*” A shield, in war, guards only one side, but the favour of God is to the saints a defence on every side; like the hedge about Job, round about, so that, while they keep themselves under the divine protection, they are entirely safe and ought to be entirely satisfied.

In singing these verses, and praying them over, we must by faith put ourselves under God's guidance and care, and then please ourselves with his mercy and grace and with the prospect of God's triumphs at last over all his enemies and his people's triumphs in him and in his salvation.