

PSALM 17

David being in great distress and danger by the malice of his enemies, does, in this psalm, by prayer address himself to God, his tried refuge, and seeks shelter in him.

- I.** He appeals to God concerning his integrity (v. 1-4).
- II.** He prays to God still to be upheld in his integrity and preserved from the malice of his enemies (v. 5-8, 13).
- III.** He gives a character of his enemies, using that as a plea with God for his preservation (v. 9-12, 14).
- IV.** He comforts himself with the hopes of his future happiness (v. 15). Some make him, in this, a type of Christ, who was perfectly innocent, and yet was hated and persecuted, but, like David, committed himself and his cause to him that judgeth righteously.

PSALM 17:1-7

SINCERE AND IMPORTUNATE PRAYER

A prayer of David.

This psalm is a prayer. As there is a time to weep and a time to rejoice, so there is a time for praise and a time for prayer. David was now persecuted, probably by Saul, who hunted him like a partridge on the mountains; without were fightings, within were fears, and both urged him as a suppliant to the throne of mercy. He addresses himself to God in these verses both by way of appeal (*Hear the right, O Lord! let my righteous cause have a hearing before thy tribunal, and give judgment upon it*) and by way of petition (*Give ear unto my prayer* v. 1, and again v. 6, *Incline thy ear unto me and hear my speech*); not that God needs to be thus pressed with our importunity, but he gives us leave thus to express our earnest desire of his gracious answers to our prayers. These things he pleads with God for audience,

1. That he was sincere, and did not dissemble with God in his prayer: *It goeth not out of feigned lips*. He meant as he spoke, and the feelings of his mind agreed with the expressions of his mouth. Feigned prayers are fruitless; but, if our hearts lead our prayers, God will meet them with his favour.

2. That he had been used to pray at other times, and it was not his distress and danger that now first brought him to his duty: “*I have called upon thee* formerly (v. 6); therefore, Lord, hear me now.” It will be a great comfort to us if trouble, when it comes, find the wheels of prayer a-going, for then we may come with the more boldness to the throne of grace. Tradesmen are willing to oblige those that have been long their customers.

3. That he was encouraged by his faith to expect God would take notice of his prayers: “*I know thou wilt hear me*, and therefore, O God, *incline thy ear to me*.” Our believing dependence upon God is a good plea to enforce our desires towards him. Let us now see,

I. What his appeal is; and here observe,

1. What the court is to the cognizance and determination of which he makes his appeal; it is the court of heaven. “Lord, do thou hear the right, for Saul is so passionate, so prejudiced, that he will not hear it. Lord, *let my sentence come forth from thy presence*, v. 2. Men sentence me to be pursued and cut off as an evil-doer. Lord, I appeal from them to thee.” This he did in a public remonstrance before Saul's face (⁽⁹²⁴²⁾1 Samuel 24:12, *The Lord judge between me and thee*), and he repeats it here in his private devotions. Note,

(1.) The equity and extent of God's government and judgment are a very great support to injured innocency. If we are blackened, and abused, and misrepresented, by unrighteous men, it is a comfort that we have a righteous God to go to, who will take our part, who is the patron of the oppressed, whose judgment is according to truth, by the discoveries of which every person and every cause will appear in a true light, stripped of all false colours, and by the decisions of which all unrighteous dooms will be reversed, and to every man will be rendered according to his work.

(2.) Sincerity dreads no scrutiny, no, not that of God himself, according to the tenour of the covenant of grace: *Let thy eyes behold the things that are equal*. God's omniscience is as much the joy of the upright as it is the

terror of hypocrites, and is particularly comfortable to those who are falsely accused and in any wise have wrong done them.

2. What the evidence is by which he hopes to make good his appeal; it is the trial God had made of him (v. 3): *Thou hast proved my heart.* God's sentence is *therefore* right, because he always proceeds upon his knowledge, which is more certain and infallible than that which men attain to by the closest views and the strictest investigations.

(1.) He knew God had tried him,

[1.] By his own conscience, which is God's deputy in the soul. *The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord,* with this God had searched him, and visited him in the night, when he *communed with his own heart upon his bed.* He had submitted to the search, and had seriously reviewed the actions of his life, to discover what was amiss, but could find nothing of that which his enemies charged him with.

[2.] By providence. God had tried him by the fair opportunity he had, once and again, to kill Saul; he had tried him by the malice of Saul, the treachery of his friends, and the many provocations that were given him; so that, if he had been the man he was represented to be, it would have appeared; but, upon all these trials, there was nothing found against him, no proof at all of the things whereof they accused him.

(2.) God tried his heart, and could witness to the integrity of that; but, for the further proof of his integrity, he himself takes notice of two things concerning which his conscience bore him record: —

[1.] That he had a fixed resolution against all sins of the tongue: *“I have purposed and fully determined, in the strength of God's grace, that my mouth shall not transgress.”* He does not say, “I hope that it will not,” or, “I wish that it may not,” but, “I have fully purposed that it shall not:” with this bridle he kept his mouth, ^{<BIB>}Psalm 39:1. Note, Constant resolution and watchfulness against sins of the tongue will be a good evidence of our integrity. *If any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man,* ^{<BIB>}James 3:2. He does not say, “My mouth never shall transgress” (for in many things we all offend), but, “I have purposed that it shall not;” and he that searches the heart knows whether the purpose be sincere.

[2.] That he had been as careful to refrain from sinful actions as from sinful words (v. 4): *“Concerning the common works of men, the actions*

and affairs of human life, *I have*, by the direction of thy word, *kept myself from the paths of the destroyer.*” Some understand it particularly, that he had not been himself a destroyer of Saul, when it lay in his power, nor had he permitted others to be so, but said to Abishai, *Destroy him not*, ^(~~1~~) Samuel 26:9. But it may be taken more generally; he kept himself from all evil works, and endeavoured, according to the duty of his place, to keep others from them too. Note, *First*, The ways of sin are paths of the destroyer, of the devil, whose name is *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*, a destroyer, who ruins souls by decoying them into the paths of sin. *Secondly*, It concerns us all to keep out of the paths of the destroyer; for, if we walk in those ways that lead to destruction, we must thank ourselves if destruction and misery be our portion at last. *Thirdly*, It is by the word of God, as our guide and rule, that we must keep out of the paths of the destroyer, by observing its directions and admonitions, ^(~~333~~) Psalm 119:9. *Fourthly*, If we carefully avoid all the paths of sin, it will be very comfortable in the reflection, when we are in trouble. If we *keep ourselves, that the wicked one touch us not* with his temptations (^(~~158~~) 1 John 5:18), we may hope he will not be able to touch us with his terrors.

II. What his petition is; it is, in short, this, That he might experience the good work of God in him, as an evidence of and qualification for the good will of God towards him: this is grace and peace from God the Father.

1. He prays for the work of God's grace in him (v. 5): “*Hold up my going in thy paths.* Lord, I have, by thy grace, kept myself from the paths of the destroyer; by the same grace let me be kept in thy paths; let me not only be restrained from doing that which is evil, but quickened to abound always in that which is good. Let my goings be held in thy paths, that I may not turn back from them nor turn aside out of them; let them be held up in thy paths, that I may not stumble and fall into sin, that I may not trifle and neglect my duty. Lord, as thou hast kept me hitherto, so keep me still.” Those that are, through grace, going in God's paths, have need to pray, and do pray, that their goings may be held up in those paths; for we stand no longer than he is pleased to hold us, we go no further than he is pleased to lead us, bear us up, and carry us. David had been kept in the way of his duty hitherto, and yet he does not think that this would be his security for the future, and therefore prays, “Lord, still hold me up.” Those that would proceed and persevere in the way of God must, by faith and prayer, fetch in daily fresh supplies of grace and strength from him. David was sensible that his way was slippery, that he himself was weak, and not so well fixed

and furnished as he should be, that there were those who watched for his halting and would improve the least slip against him, and therefore he prays, “Lord, hold me up, that my foot slip not, that I may never say nor do any thing that looks either dishonest or distrustful of thee and thy providence and promise.”

2. He prays for the tokens of God's favour to him, v. 7. Observe here,

(1.) How he eyes God as the protector and Saviour of his people, so he calls him, and thence he takes his encouragement in prayer: *O thou that savest by thy right hand* (by thy own power, and needest not the agency of any other) *those who put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them*. It is the character of God's people that they trust in him; he is pleased to make them confidants, for his secret is with the righteous; and they make him their trust, for to him they commit themselves. Those that trust in God have many enemies, many that rise up against them and seek their ruin; but they have one friend that is able to deal with them all, and, if he be for them, no matter who is against them. He reckons it his honour to be their Saviour. His almighty power is engaged for them, and they have all found him ready to save them. The margin reads it, *O thou that savest those who trust in thee from those that rise up against thy right hand*. Those that are enemies to the saints are rebels against God and his right hand, and therefore, no doubt, he will, in due time, appear against them.

(2.) What he expects and desires from God: *Show thy marvellous loving-kindness*. The word signifies,

[1.] Distinguishing favours. “Set apart thy loving-kindnesses for me; put me not off with common mercies, but be gracious to me, *as thou ushest to do to those who love thy name*.”

[2.] Wonderful favours. “O make thy loving-kindness admirable! Lord, testify thy favour to me in such a way that I and others may wonder at it.” God's loving-kindness is marvellous for the freeness and the fulness of it; in some instances it appears, in a special manner, marvellous (⁴⁸³Psalm 118:23), and it will certainly appear so in the salvation of the saints, when Christ shall come to be *glorified in the saints and to be admired in all those that believe*.

PSALM 17:8-15

CHARACTER OF DAVID'S ENEMIES

We may observe, in these verses,

I. What David prays for. Being compassed about with enemies that sought his life, he prays to God to preserve him safely through all their attempts against him, to the crown to which he was anointed. This prayer is both a prediction of the preservation of Christ through all the hardships and difficulties of his humiliation, to the glories and joys of his exalted state, and a pattern to Christians to commit the keeping of their souls to God, trusting him to *preserve them to his heavenly kingdom*. He prays,

1. That he himself might be protected (v. 8): “Keep me safe, hide me close, where I may not be found, where I may not be come at. Deliver my soul, not only my mortal life from death, but my immortal spirit from sin.” Those who put themselves under God's protection may in faith implore the benefit of it.

(1.) He prays that God would keep him,

[1.] With as much care as a man keeps the apple of his eye with, which nature has wonderfully fenced and teaches us to guard. If we keep God's law as the *apple of our eye* (^{AMP}Proverbs 7:2), we may expect that God will so keep us; for it is said concerning his people that whoso *touches them touches the apple of his eye*, ^{AMP}Zechariah 2:8.

[2.] With as much tenderness as the hen gathers her young ones under her wings with; Christ uses the similitude, ^{AMP}Matthew 23:37. “*Hide me under the shadow of thy wings*, where I may be both safe and warm.” Or, perhaps, it rather alludes to the wings of the cherubim shadowing the mercy-seat: “Let me be taken under the protection of that glorious grace which is peculiar to God's Israel.” What David here prays for was performed to the Son of David, our Lord Jesus, of whom it is said (^{AMP}Isaiah 49:2) that God hid *him in the shadow of his hand*, hid him as a *polished shaft in his quiver*.

(2.) David further prays, “Lord, keep me from the wicked, from men of the world,”

[1.] “From being, and doing, like them, from walking in their counsel, and standing in their way, and eating of their dainties.”

[2.] “From being destroyed and run down by them. Let them not have their will against me; let them not triumph over me.”

2. That all the designs of his enemies to bring his either into sin or into trouble might be defeated (v. 13): “*Arise, O Lord!* appear for me, disappoint him, and cast him down in his own eyes by the disappointment.” While Saul persecuted David, how often did he miss his prey, when he thought he had him sure! And how were Christ's enemies disappointed by his resurrection, who thought they had gained their point when they had put him to death!

II. What he pleads for the encouraging of his own faith in these petitions, and his hope of speeding. He pleads,

1. The malice and wickedness of his enemies: “They are such as are not fit to be countenanced, such as, if I be not delivered from them by the special care of God himself, will be my ruin. Lord, see what wicked men those are that oppress me, and waste me, and run me down.”

(1.) “They are very spiteful and malicious; they are *my deadly enemies*, that thirst after my blood, my heart's blood — *enemies against the soul*,” so the word is. David's enemies did what they could to drive him to sin and drive him away from God; they bade him *go serve other gods* (~~1~~ Samuel 26:19), and therefore he had reason to pray against them. Note, Those are our worst enemies, and we ought so to account them, that are enemies to our souls.

(2.) “They are very secure and sensual, insolent and haughty (v. 10): *They are enclosed in their own fat*, wrap themselves, hug themselves, in their own honour, and power, and plenty, and then make light of God, and set his judgments at defiance, ~~73:7~~ Psalm 73:7; ~~15:27~~ Job 15:27. They wallow in pleasure, and promise themselves that to-morrow shall be as this day. And therefore with their mouth they speak proudly, glorying in themselves, blaspheming God, trampling upon his people, and insulting them.” See ~~13:5, 6~~ Revelation 13:5, 6. “Lord, are not such men as these fit to be mortified and humbled, and made to know themselves? Will it not be for thy glory to look upon these proud men and abase them?”

(3.) “They are restless and unwearied in their attempts against me: They *compass me about*, v. 9. They have now in a manner gained their point; they have surrounded us, they have compassed us in our steps, they track us wherever we go, follow us as close as the hound does the hare, and take all advantages against us, being both too many and too quick for us. And yet they pretend to look another way, and set their eyes bowing down to the earth, as if they were meditating, retired into themselves, and thinking of something else;” or (as some think), “They are watchful and intent upon it, to do us a mischief; they are down-looked, and never let slip any opportunity of compassing their design.”

(4.) “The ringleader of them (that was Saul) is in a special manner bloody and barbarous, politic and projecting (v. 12), *like a lion* that lives by prey and is therefore greedy of it.” It is as much the meat and drink of a wicked man to do mischief as it is of a good man to do good. He is like *a young lion lurking in secret places*, disguising his cruel designs. This is fitly applied to Saul, who sought David *on the rocks of the wild goats* (¹⁰⁸¹1 Samuel 24:2) and in *the wilderness of Ziph* (¹⁰⁸²Psalm 26:2), where lions used to lurk for their prey.

2. The power God had over them, to control and restrain them. He pleads,

(1.) “Lord, they are *thy sword*; and will any father suffer his sword to be drawn against his own children?” As this is a reason why we should patiently bear the injuries of men, that they are but the instruments of the trouble (it comes originally from God, to whose will we are bound to submit), so it is an encouragement to us to hope both that their wrath shall praise him and that the remainder thereof he will restrain, that they are God's sword, which he can manage as he pleases, which cannot move without him, and which he will sheathe when he has done his work with it.

(2.) “They are *thy hand*, by which thou dost chastise thy people and make them feel thy displeasure.” He therefore expects deliverance from God's hand because from God's hand the trouble came. *Una eademque manus vulnus opemque tulit* — *The same hand wounds and heals*. There is no flying from God's hand but by flying to it. It is very comfortable, when we are in fear of the power of man, to see it dependent upon and in subjection to the power of God; see ²³⁰⁶Isaiah 10:6, 7, 15.

3. Their outward prosperity (v. 14): “Lord, appear against them, for,”

(1.) “They are entirely devoted to the world, and care not for thee and thy favour. They are *men of the world*, actuated by the spirit of the world, walking according to the course of this world, in love with the wealth and pleasure of this world, eager in the pursuits of it (making them their business) and at ease in the enjoyments of it — making them their bliss. They *have their portion in this life*; they look upon the good things of this world as the best things, and sufficient to make them happy, and they choose them accordingly, place their felicity in them, and aim at them as their chief good; they rest satisfied with them, their souls take their ease in them, and they look no further, nor are in any care to provide for another life. These things are their consolation (^{<4064>}Luke 6:24), *their good things* (^{<4065>}Luke 16:25), *their reward* (^{<4065>}Matthew 6:5), the penny they agreed for, ^{<4065>}Matthew 20:13. Now, Lord, shall men of this character be supported and countenanced against those who honour thee by preferring thy favour before all the wealth in this world, and taking thee for their portion?” ^{<4065>}Psalms 16:5.

(2.) They have abundance of the world.

[1.] They have enlarged appetites, and a great deal wherewith to satisfy them: *Their bellies thou fillest with thy hidden treasures*. The things of this world are called *treasures*, because they are so accounted; otherwise, to a soul, and in comparison with eternal blessings, they are but trash. They are hidden in the several parts of the creation, and hidden in the sovereign disposals of Providence. They are God's hidden treasures, for the earth is his and the fulness thereof, though the men of the world think it is their own and forget God's property in it. Those that fare deliciously every day have their *bellies filled with these hidden treasures*; and they will but *fill the belly* (^{<4065>}1 Corinthians 6:13); they will not fill the soul; they are not bread for that, nor can they satisfy, ^{<2581>}Isaiah 55:2. They are husks, and ashes, and wind; and yet most men, having no care for their souls, but all for their bellies, take up with them.

[2.] They have numerous families, and a great deal to leave to them: *They are full of children*, and yet their pasture is not overstocked; they have enough for them all, and *leave the rest of their substance to their babes*, to their grand-children; and this is their heaven, it is their bliss, it is their all. “Lord,” said David, “*deliver me from them*; let me not have my portion with them. Deliver me from their designs against me; for, they having so

much wealth and power, I am not able to deal with them unless the Lord be on my side.”

4. He pleads his own dependence upon God as his portion and happiness. “They have their portion in this life, but as for me (v. 15) I am none of them, I have but little of the world. *Nec habeo, nec careo, nec curo* — *I neither have, nor need, nor care for it.* It is the vision and fruition of God that I place my happiness in; that is it I hope for, and comfort myself with the hopes of, and thereby distinguish myself from those who have their portion in this life.” Beholding God's face with satisfaction may be considered,

(1.) As our duty and comfort in this world. We must in righteousness (clothed with Christ's righteousness, having a good heart and a good life) by faith behold God's face and set him always before us, must entertain ourselves from day to day with the contemplation of the beauty of the Lord; and, when we awake every morning, we must be satisfied with his likeness set before us in his word, and with his likeness stamped upon us by his renewing grace. Our experience of God's favour to us, and our conformity to him, should yield us more satisfaction than those have whose belly is filled with the delights of sense.

(2.) As our recompence and happiness in the other world. With the prospect of that he concluded the foregoing psalm, and so this. That happiness is prepared and designed only for the righteous that are justified and sanctified. They shall be put in possession of it when they awake, when the soul awakes, at death, out of its slumber in the body, and when the body awakes, at the resurrection, out of its slumber in the grave. That blessedness will consist in three things: —

[1.] The immediate vision of God and his glory: *I shall behold thy face*, not, as in this world, through a glass darkly. The knowledge of God will there be perfected and the enlarged intellect filled with it.

[2.] The participation of his likeness. Our holiness will there be perfect. This results from the former (^{GRB}1 John 3:2): *When he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

[3.] A complete and full satisfaction resulting from all this: *I shall be satisfied*, abundantly satisfied with it. There is no satisfaction for a soul but in God, and in his face and likeness, his good-will towards us and his

good work in us; and even that satisfaction will not be perfect till we come to heaven.