

PSALM 31

It is probable that David penned this psalm when he was persecuted by Saul; some passages in it agree particularly to the narrow escapes he had, at Keilah (~~1~~ 1 Samuel 23:13), then in the wilderness of Maon, when Saul marched on one side of the hill and he on the other, and, soon after, in the cave in the wilderness of En-gedi; but that it was penned upon any of those occasions we are not told. It is a mixture of prayers, and praises, and professions of confidence in God, all which do well together and are helpful to one another.

I. David professes his cheerful confidence in God, and, in that confidence, prays for deliverance out of his present troubles (v. 1-8).

II. He complains of the very deplorable condition he was in, and, in the sense of his calamities, still prays that God would graciously appear for him against his persecutors (v. 9-18).

III. He concludes the psalm with praise and triumph, giving glory to God, and encouraging himself and others to trust in him (v. 19-24).

~~1~~ PSALM 31:1-8

PROFESSION OF CONFIDENCE IN GOD


To the chief musician. A psalm of David.

Faith and prayer must go together. He that believes, let his pray — *I believe, therefore I have spoken*: and he that prays, let him believe, for the prayer of faith is the prevailing prayer. We have both here.

I. David, in distress, is very earnest with God in prayer for succour and relief. This eases a burdened spirit, fetches in promised mercies, and wonderfully supports and comforts the soul in the expectation of them. He prays,

1. That God would deliver him (v. 1), that his life might be preserved from the malice of his enemies, and that an end might be put to their

persecutions of him, that God, not only in his mercy, but in righteousness, would deliver him, as a righteous Judge betwixt him and his unrighteous persecutors, that he would bow down his ear to his petitions, to his appeals, and deliver him, v. 2. It is condescension in God to take cognizance of the case of the greatest and best of men; he humbles himself to do it. The psalmist prays also that he would deliver him speedily, lest, if the deliverance were long deferred, his faith should fail.

2. That if he did not immediately deliver him out of his troubles, yet he would protect and shelter him in his troubles; *“Be thou my strong rock, immovable, impregnable, as a fastness framed by nature, and my house of defence, a fortress framed by art, and all to save me.”* Thus we may pray that God's providence would secure to us our lives and comforts, and that by his grace we may be enabled to think ourselves safe in him,  Proverbs 18:10.

3. That his case having much in it of difficulty, both in respect of duty and in respect of prudence, he might be under the divine guidance: *“Lord, lead me and guide me* (v. 3), so order my steps, so order my spirit, that I may never do any thing unlawful and unjustifiable — against my conscience, nor unwise and indiscreet — against my interest.” Those that resolve to follow God's direction may in faith pray for it.

4. That his enemies being very crafty, as well as very spiteful, God would frustrate and baffle their designs against him (v. 4): *“Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me, and keep me from the sin, the trouble, the death, they aim to entrap me in.”*

II. In this prayer he gives glory to God by a repeated profession of his confidence in him and dependence on him. This encouraged his prayers and qualified him for the mercies he prayed for (v. 1): *“In thee, O Lord! do I put my trust, and not in myself, or any sufficiency of my own, or in any creature; let me never be ashamed, let me not be disappointed of any of that good which thou hast promised me and which therefore I have promised myself in thee.”*

1. He had chosen God for his protector, and God had, by his promise, undertaken to be so (v. 3): *“Thou art my rock and my fortress, by thy covenant with me and my believing consent to that covenant; therefore be my strong rock,”* v. 2. Those that have in sincerity avouched the Lord for theirs may expect the benefit of his being so; for God's relations to us

carry with them both name and thing. *Thou art my strength*, v. 4. If God be our strength, we may hope that he will both put his strength in us and put forth his strength for us.

2. He gave up his soul in a special manner to him (v. 5): *Into thy hands I commit my spirit*.

(1.) If David here looks upon himself as a dying man, by these words he resigns his departing soul to God who gave it, and to whom, at death, the spirit returns. “Men can but kill the body, but I trust in God to *redeem my soul from the power of the grave*,” ^{<49:15>} Psalm 49:15. He is willing to die if God will have it so; but let my soul *fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great*. With these words our Lord Jesus yielded up the ghost upon the cross, and made his soul an offering, a free-will offering for sin, voluntarily laying down his life a ransom. By Stephen's example we are taught in, our dying moment, to eye Christ at God's right hand, and to commit our spirits to him: *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*. But,

(2.) David is here to be looked upon as a man in distress and trouble. And,

[1.] His great care is about his soul, his spirit, his better part. Note, Our outward afflictions should increase our concern for our souls. Many think that while they are perplexed about their worldly affairs, and Providence multiplies their cares about them, they may be excused if they neglect their souls; whereas the greater hazard our lives and secular interests lie at the more we are concerned to look to our souls, that, though the outward man perish, the inward man may suffer no damage (^{<4:16>} 2 Corinthians 4:16), and that we may keep possession of our souls when we can keep possession of nothing else, ^{<21:19>} Luke 21:19.

[2.] He thinks the best he can do for the soul is to commit it into the hand of God, and lodge that great trust with him. He had prayed (v. 4) to be plucked out of the net of outward trouble, but, as not insisting upon that (God's will be done), he immediately lets fall that petition, and commits the spirit, the inward man, into God's hand. “Lord, however it goes with me, as to my body, let it go well with my soul.” Note, It is the wisdom and duty of every one of us solemnly to commit our spirits into the hands of God, to be sanctified by his grace, devoted to his honour, employed in his service, and fitted for his kingdom. That which encourages us to commit our spirits into the hand of God is that he has not only created, but redeemed, them; the particular redemptions of the Old-Testament church

and the Old-Testament saints were typical of our redemption by Jesus Christ, ^{<1485>}Genesis 48:16. The redemption of the soul is so precious that it must have ceased for ever if Christ had not undertaken it; but, by redeeming our souls, he has not only acquired an additional right and title to them, which obliges us to commit them to him as his own, but has shown the extraordinary kindness and concern he has for them, which encourages us to commit them to him, to be preserved to his heavenly kingdom (^{<3012>}2 Timothy 1:12): “*Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth! redeem me according to a promise which thou wilt be true to.*”

III. He disclaimed all confederacy with those that made an arm of flesh their confidence (v. 6): *I have hated those that regard lying vanities* — idolaters (to some), who expect aid from false gods, which are vanity and a lie — astrologers, and those that give heed to them, so others. David abhorred the use of enchantments and divinations; he consulted not, nor even took notice of, the flight of birds or entrails of beasts, good omens or bad omens; they are lying vanities, and he not only did not regard them himself, but hated the wickedness of those that did. He trusted in God only, and not in any creature. His interest in the court or country, his retreats or strongholds, even Goliath's sword itself — these were lying vanities, which he could not depend upon, but trusted in the Lord only. See ^{<3904>}Psalms 40:4; ^{<2475>}Jeremiah 17:5.

IV. He comforted himself with his hope in God, and made himself, not only easy, but cheerful, with it, v. 7. Having relied on God's mercy, he will be glad and rejoice in it; and those know not how to value their hope in God who cannot find joy enough in that hope to counterbalance their grievances and silence their griefs.

V. He encouraged himself in this hope with the experiences he had had of late, and formerly, of God's goodness to him, which he mentions to the glory of God; he that has delivered doth and will.

1. God had taken notice of his afflictions and all the circumstances of them: “*Thou hast considered my trouble*, with wisdom to suit relief to it, with condescension and compassion regarding the low estate of thy servant.”

2. He had observed the temper of his spirit and the workings of his heart under his afflictions: “*Thou hast known my soul in adversities*, with a tender concern and care for it.” God's eye is upon our souls when we are in

trouble, to see whether they be humbled for sin, submissive to the will of God, and bettered by the affliction. If the soul, when cast down under affliction, has been lifted up to him in true devotion, he knows it.

3. He had rescued him out of the hands of Saul when he had him safe enough in Keilah (~~1~~¹ Samuel 23:7): “*Thou hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy, but set me at liberty, in a large room, where I may shift for my own safety,*” v. 8. Christ's using those words (v. 5) upon the cross may warrant us to apply all this to Christ, who trusted in his Father and was supported and delivered by him, and (because he humbled himself) highly exalted, which it is proper to think of when we sing these verses, as also therein to acknowledge the experience we have had of God's gracious presence with us in our troubles and to encourage ourselves to trust in him for the future.

~~180~~ PSALM 31:9-18

HUMBLE AND BELIEVING PRAYER

In the foregoing verses David had appealed to God's righteousness, and pleaded his relation to him and dependence on him; here he appeals to his mercy, and pleads the greatness of his own misery, which made his case the proper object of that mercy. Observe,

I. The complaint he makes of his trouble and distress (v. 9): “*Have mercy upon me, O Lord! for I am in trouble, and need thy mercy.*” The remembrance he makes of his condition is not much unlike some even of Job's complaints.

1. His troubles had fixed a very deep impression upon his mind and made him a man of sorrows. So great was his grief that his very soul was consumed with it, and his life spent with it, and he was continually sighing, v. 9, 10. Herein he was a type of Christ, — who was intimately acquainted with grief and often in tears. We may guess by David's complexion, which was ruddy and sanguine, by his genius for music, and by his daring enterprises in his early days, that his natural disposition was both cheerful and firm, that he was apt to be cheerful, and not to lay trouble to his heart; yet here we see what he is brought to: he has almost wept out his eyes, and sighed away his breath. Let those that are airy and

gay take heed of running into extremes, and never set sorrow at defiance; God can find out ways to make them melancholy if they will not otherwise learn to be serious.

2. His body was afflicted with the sorrows of his mind (v. 10): *My strength fails, my bones are consumed, and all because of my iniquity.* As to Saul, and the quarrel he had with him, he could confidently insist upon his righteousness; but, as it was an affliction God laid upon him, he owns he had deserved it, and freely confesses his iniquity to have been the procuring cause of all his trouble; and the sense of sin touched him to the quick and wasted him more than all his calamities.

3. His friends were unkind and became shy of him. He was *a fear to his acquaintance*, when they saw him they *fled from him*, v. 11. They durst not harbour him nor give him any assistance, durst not show him any countenance, nor so much as be seen in his company, for fear of being brought into trouble by it, now that Saul had proclaimed him a traitor and outlawed him. They saw how dearly Ahimelech the priest had paid for aiding and abetting him, though ignorantly; and therefore, though they could not but own he had a great deal of wrong done him, yet they had not the courage to appear for him. He was forgotten by them, *as a dead man out of mind* (v. 12), and looked upon with contempt *as a broken vessel*. Those that showed him all possible respect when he was in honour at court, now that he had fallen into disgrace, though unjustly, were strange to him. Such swallow-friends the world is full of, that are gone in winter. Let those that fall on the losing side not think it strange if they be thus deserted, but make sure a friend in heaven, that will not fail them, and make use of him.

4. His enemies were unjust in their censures of him. They would not have persecuted him as they did if they had not first represented him as a bad man; he was a *reproach among all his enemies, but especially among his neighbours*, v. 11. Those that had been the witnesses of his integrity, and could not but be convinced in their consciences that he was an honest man, were the most forward to represent him quite otherwise, that they might curry favour with Saul. Thus he *heard the slander of many*; every one had a stone to throw at him, because *fear was in every side*; that is, they durst not do otherwise, for he that would not join with his neighbours to accuse David was looked upon as disaffected to Saul. Thus the best of

men have been represented under the worst characters by those that resolved to give them the worst treatment.

5. His life was aimed at and he went in continual peril of it. Fear was on every side, and he knew that, whatever counsel his enemies took against him, the design was not to take away his liberty, but to take away his life (v. 13), a life so valuable, so useful, to the good services of which all Israel owed so much, and which was never forfeited. Thus, in all the plots of the Pharisees and Herodians against Christ, still the design was to take away his life, such are the enmity and cruelty of the serpent's seed.

II. His confidence in God in the midst of these troubles. Every thing looked black and dismal round about him, and threatened to drive him to despair: "*But I trusted in thee, O Lord!*" (v. 14) and was thereby kept from sinking." His enemies robbed him of his reputation among men, but they could not rob him of his comfort in God, because they could not drive him from his confidence in God. Two things he comforted himself with in his straits, and he went to God and pleaded them with him: —

1. "*Thou art my God;* I have chosen thee for mine, and thou hast promised to be mine;" and, if he be ours and we can by faith call him so, it is enough, when we can call nothing else ours. "*Thou art my God; and therefore to whom shall I go for relief but to thee?*" Those need not be straitened in their prayers who can plead this; for, if God undertake to be our God, he will do that for us which will answer the compass and vast extent of the engagement.

2. *My times are in thy hand.* Join this with the former and it makes the comfort complete. If God have our times in his hand, he can help us; and, if he be our God, he will help us; and then what can discourage us? It is a great support to those who have God for their God that their times are in his hand and he will be sure to order and dispose of them for the best, to all those who commit their spirits also into his hand, to suit them to their times, as David here, v. 5. The time of life is in God's hands, to lengthen or shorten, embitter or sweeten, as he pleases, according to the counsel of his will. Our times (all events that concern us, and the timing of them) are at God's disposal; they are not in our own hands, for the way of man is not in himself, not in our friends' hands, nor in our enemies' hands, but in God's; *every man's judgment proceedeth from him.* David does not, in his prayers, prescribe to God, but subscribe to him. "Lord, my times are in thy

hand, and I am well pleased that they are so; they could not be in a better hand. Thy will be done.”

III. His petitions to God, in this faith and confidence,

1. He prays that God would deliver him out of the hand of his enemies (v. 15), and save him (v. 16), and this for his mercies' sake, and not for any merit of his own. Our opportunities are in God's hand (so some read it), and therefore he knows how to choose the best and fittest time for our deliverance, and we must be willing to wait that time. When David had Saul at his mercy in the cave those about him said, “*This is the time* in which God will deliver thee,” ~~1 Samuel~~ 1 Samuel 24:4. “No,” says David, “the time has not come for my deliverance till it can be wrought without sin; and I will wait for that time; for it is God's time, and that is the best time.”

2. That God would give him the comfort of his favour in the mean time (v. 16): “*Make thy face to shine upon thy servant*; let me have the comfortable tokens and evidences of thy favour to me, and that shall put gladness in my heart in the midst of all my griefs.”

3. That his prayers to God might be answered and his hopes in God accomplished (v. 17): “*Let me not be ashamed* of my hopes and prayers, *for I have called upon thee*, who never saidst to thy people, Seek in vain, and hope in vain.”

4. That shame and silence might be the portion of wicked people, and particularly of his enemies. They were confident of their success against David, and that they should run him down and ruin him. “Lord,” says he, “let them be made ashamed of that confidence by the disappointment of their expectations,” as those that opposed the building of the wall about Jerusalem, when it was finished, were *much cast down in their own eye*, ~~Nehemiah~~ Nehemiah 6:16. *Let them be silent in the grave*. Note, Death will silence the rage and clamour of cruel persecutors, whom reason would not silence. In the grave the wicked cease from troubling. Particularly, he prays for (that is, he prophesies) the silencing of those that reproach and calumniate the people of God (v. 18): *Let lying lips be put to silence, that speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous*. This is a very good prayer which,

(1.) We have often occasion to put up to God; for those that set their mouth against the heavens commonly revile the heirs of heaven. Religion, in the strict and serious professors of it, are every where spoken against,

[1.] With a great deal of malice: They speak *grievous things*, on purpose to vex them, and hoping, with what they say, to do them a real mischief. They speak *hard things* (so the word is), which bear hard upon them, and by which they hope to fasten indelible characters of infamy upon them.

[2.] With a great deal of falsehood: They are *lying lips*, taught by the father of lies and serving his interest.

[3.] With a great deal of scorn and disdain: They speak *proudly and contemptuously*, as if the righteous, whom God has honoured, were the most despicable people in the world, and not worthy to be set with the dogs of their flock. One would think they thought it no sin to tell a deliberate lie if it might but serve to expose a good man either to hatred or contempt. *Hear, O our God! for we are despised.*

(2.) We may pray in faith; for these lying lips shall be put to silence. God has many ways of doing it. Sometimes he convinces the consciences of those that reproach his people, and turns their hearts. Sometimes by his providence he visibly confutes their calumnies, and brings forth the righteousness of his people as the light. However, there is a day coming when God will convince ungodly sinners of the falsehood of all the hard speeches that have spoken against his people and will execute judgment upon them, ^{<B114>}Jude 1:14, 15. Then shall this prayer be fully answered, and to that day we should have an eye in the singing of it, engaging ourselves likewise by well-doing, if possible, to *silence the ignorance of foolish men*, ^{<B125>}1 Peter 2:15.

~~<B119>~~ PSALM 31:19-24

TRIUMPHANT PRAISE

We have three things in these verses: —

I. The believing acknowledgment which David makes of God's goodness to his people in general, v. 19, 20.

1. God is good to all, but he is, in a special manner, good to Israel. His goodness to them is wonderful, and will be, to eternity, matter of admiration: *O how great is thy goodness!* How profound are the counsels of it! how rich are the treasures of it! how free and extensive are the communications of it! Those very persons whom men load with slanders God loads with benefits and honours. Those who are interested in this goodness are described to be such as fear God and trust in him, as stand in awe of his greatness and rely on his grace. This goodness is said to be *laid up for them* and *wrought for them*.

(1.) There is a goodness laid up for them in the other world, an inheritance reserved in heaven (~~400~~ 1 Peter 1:4), and there is a goodness wrought for them in this world, goodness wrought in them. There is enough in God's goodness both for the portion and inheritance of all his children when they come to their full age, and for their maintenance and education during their minority. There is enough in bank and enough in hand.

(2.) This goodness is laid up in his promise for all that fear God, to whom assurance is given that they shall want no good thing. But it is wrought, in the actual performance of the promise, for those that trust in him — that by faith take hold of the promise, put it in suit, and draw out to themselves the benefit and comfort of it. If what is laid up for us in the treasures of the everlasting covenant be not wrought for us, it is our own fault, because we do not believe. But those that trust in God, as they have the comfort of his goodness in their own bosoms, so they have the credit of it (and the credit of an estate goes far with some); it is wrought for them *before the sons of men*. God's goodness to them puts an honour upon them and rolls away their reproach; *for all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed*, ~~289~~ Isaiah 61:9.

2. God preserves man and beast; but he is, in a special manner, the protector of his own people (v. 20): *Thou shalt hide them*. As his goodness is hid and reserved for them, so they are hid and preserved for it. The saints are God's hidden ones. See here,

(1.) The danger they are in, which arises from the pride of man and from the strife of tongues; proud men insult over them and would trample on them and tread them down; contentious men pick quarrels with them; and, when tongues are at strife, good people often go by the worst. The pride of men endangers their liberty; the strife of tongues in perverse disputings endangers truth. But,

(2.) See the defence they are under: *Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence, in a pavilion.* God's providence shall keep them safe from the malice of their enemies. He has many ways of sheltering them. When Baruch and Jeremiah were sought for *the Lord hid them*, ²⁸³⁶Jeremiah 36:26. God's grace shall keep them safe from the evil of the judgments that are abroad; to them they have no sting; and they shall be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger, for there is no anger at them. His comforts shall keep them easy and cheerful; his sanctuary, where they have communion with him, shelters them from the fiery darts of terror and temptation; and the mansions in his house above shall be shortly, shall be eternally, their hiding-place from all danger and fear.

II. The thankful returns which David makes for God's goodness to him in particular, v. 21, 22. Having admired God's goodness to all the saints, he here owns how good he had found him.

1. Without were fightings; but God had wonderfully preserved his life: *"He has shown me his marvellous loving-kindness,* he has given me an instance of his care for me and favour to me, beyond what I could have expected." God's loving-kindness to his people, all things considered, is wonderful; but some instances of it, even in this world, are in a special manner marvelous in their eyes; as this here, when God preserved David from the sword of Saul, in caves and woods, as safe as if he had been in a strong city. In Keilah, that strong city, God showed him great mercy, both in making him an instrument to rescue the inhabitants out of the hands of the Philistines and then in rescuing him from the same men who would have ungratefully delivered him up into the hand of Saul, ⁴²³⁵1 Samuel 23:5, 12. This was marvellous loving-kindness indeed, upon which he writes, with wonder and thankfulness, *Blessed be the Lord.* Special preservations call for particular thanksgivings.

2. Within were fears; but God was better to him than his fears, v. 22. He here keeps an account,

(1.) Of his own folly, in distrusting God, which he acknowledges, to his shame. Though he had express promises to build upon, and great experience of God's care concerning him in many straits, yet he had entertained this hard and jealous thought of God, and could not forbear telling it him to his face. *"I am cut off before thy eyes; thou hast quite forsaken me, and I must not expect to be looked upon or regarded by thee*

any more. *I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul*, and so be cut off before thy eyes, be ruined while thou lookest on," ~~1~~ Samuel 27:1. This he said in his *flight* (so some read it), which denotes the distress of his affairs. Saul was just at his back, and ready to seize him, which made the temptation strong. *In my haste* (so we read it), which denotes the disturbance and discomposure of his mind, which made the temptation surprising, so that it found him off his guard. Note, It is a common thing to speak amiss when we speak in haste and without consideration; but what we speak amiss in haste we must repent of at leisure, particularly that which we have spoken distrustfully of God.

(2.) Of God's wonderful goodness to him notwithstanding. Though his faith failed, God's promise did not: *Thou hearest the voice of my supplication*, for all this. He mentions his own unbelief as a foil to God's fidelity, serving to make his loving-kindness the more marvellous, the more illustrious. When we have thus distrusted God he might justly take us at our word, and bring our fears upon us, as he did on Israel, ~~Numbers~~ Numbers 14:28; ~~Isaiah~~ Isaiah 66:4. But he has pitied and pardoned us, and our unbelief has not made his promise and grace of no effect; for he knows our frame.

III. The exhortation and encouragement which he hereupon gives to all the saints, v. 23, 24.

1. He would have them set their love on God (v. 23): *O love the Lord! all you his saints*. Those that have their own hearts full of love to God cannot but desire that others also may be in love with him; for in his favour there is no need to fear a rival. It is the character of the saints that they do love God; and yet they must still be called upon to love him, to love him more and love him better, and give proofs of their love. We must love him, not only for his goodness, because *he preserves the faithful*, but for his justice, because *he plentifully rewards the proud doer* (who would ruin those whom he preserves), according to their pride. Some take it in a good sense; he plentifully rewards the magnificent (or excellent) doer, that is daringly good, whose heart, like Jehoshaphat's, is lifted up in the ways of the Lord. He rewards him that does well, but plentifully rewards him that does excellently well.

2. He would have them set their hope in God (v. 24): "*Be of good courage*; have a good heart on it; whatever difficulties or dangers you may

meet with, the God you trust in shall by that trust strengthen your heart.” Those that hope in God have reason to be of good courage, and let their hearts be strong, for, as nothing truly evil can befall them, so nothing truly good for them shall be wanting to them.

In singing this we should animate ourselves and one another to proceed and persevere in our Christian course, whatever threatens us, and whoever frowns upon us.