

PSALM 102

Some think that David penned this psalm at the time of Absalom's rebellion; others that Daniel, Nehemiah, or some other prophet, penned it for the use of the church, when it was in captivity in Babylon, because it seems to speak of the ruin of Zion and of a time set for the rebuilding of it, which Daniel understood by books, ²⁷⁰⁰²Daniel 9:2. Or perhaps the psalmist was himself in great affliction, which he complains of in the beginning of the psalm, but (as in Psalm 77 and elsewhere) he comforts himself under it with the consideration of God's eternity, and the church's prosperity and perpetuity, how much soever it was now distressed and threatened. But it is clear, from the application of v. 25, 26, to Christ (³⁸¹⁰Hebrews 1:10-12), that the psalm has reference to the days of the Messiah, and speaks either of his affliction or of the afflictions of his church for his sake. In the psalm we have,

- I. A sorrowful complaint which the psalmist makes, either for himself or in the name of the church, of great afflictions, which were very pressing (v. 1-11).
- II. Seasonable comfort fetched in against these grievances,
 1. From the eternity of God (v. 12, 24, 27).
 2. From a believing prospect of the deliverance which God would, in due time, work for his afflicted church (v. 13-22) and the continuance of it in the world (v. 28). In singing this psalm, if we have not occasion to make the same complaints, yet we may take occasion to sympathize with those that have, and then the comfortable part of this psalm will be the more comfortable to us in the singing of it.

~~PSA~~ PSALM 102:1-11

COMPLAINTS IN AFFLICTION

A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.

The title of this psalm is very observable; it is *a prayer of the afflicted*. It was composed by one that was himself afflicted, afflicted with the church and for it; and on those that are of a public spirit afflictions of that kind lie heavier than any other. It is calculated for an afflicted state, and is

intended for the use of others that may be in the like distress; for *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written designedly for our use*. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but here, as often elsewhere, the Holy Ghost has drawn up our petition for us, has put words into our mouths. ⁽³⁴²⁾Hosea 14:2, *Take with you words*. Here is a prayer put into the hands of the afflicted: let them set, not their hands, but their hearts to it, and present it to God. Note,

1. It is often the lot of the best saints in this world to be sorely affected.
2. Even good men may be almost overwhelmed with their afflictions, and may be ready to faint under them.
3. When our state is afflicted, and our spirits are overwhelmed, it is our duty and interest to pray, and by prayer to *pour out our complaints before the Lord*, which intimates the leave God gives us to be free with him and the liberty of speech we have before him, as well as liberty of access to him; it intimates also what an ease it is to an afflicted spirit to unburden itself by a humble representation of its grievances and griefs. Such a representation we have here, in which,

I. The psalmist humbly begs of God to take notice of his affliction, and of his prayer in his affliction, v. 1, 2. When we pray in our affliction,

1. It should be our care that God would graciously hear us; for, if our prayers be not pleasing to God, they will be to no purpose to ourselves. Let this therefore be in our eye that our prayer may *come unto God, even to his ears* (⁽³⁸⁶⁾Psalm 18:6); and, in order to that, let us *lift up the prayer*, and our souls with it.

2. It may be our hope that God will graciously hear us, because he has appointed us to seek him and has promised we shall not seek him in vain. If we put up a *prayer in faith*, we may in faith say, *Hear my prayer, O Lord!* "Hear me," that is,

(1.) "Manifest thyself to me, *hide not thy face from me* in displeasure, *when I am in trouble*. If thou dost not quickly free me, yet let me know that thou favourest me; if I see not the operations of thy hand for me, yet let me see the smiles of thy face upon me." God's hiding his face is trouble enough to a good man even in his prosperity (⁽⁴⁰⁶⁾Psalm 30:7, *Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled*); but if, when we are in trouble, God hides his face, the case is sad indeed.

(2.) “Manifest thyself for me; not only hear me, but answer me; grant me the deliverance I am in want of and in pursuit of; answer me speedily, even *in the day when I call.*” When troubles press hard upon us, God gives us leave to be thus pressing in prayer, yet with humility and patience.

II. He makes a lamentable complaint of the low condition to which he was reduced by his afflictions.

1. His body was macerated and emaciated, and he had become a perfect skeleton, nothing but skin and bones. As prosperity and joy are represented by *making fat the bones*, and the *bones flourishing like a herb*, so great trouble and grief are here represented by the contrary: *My bones are burnt as a hearth* (v. 3); they *cleave to my skin* (v. 5); nay, *my heart is smitten, and withered like grass* (v. 4); it touches the vitals, and there is a sensible decay there. *I am withered like grass* (v. 11), scorched with the burning heat of my troubles. If we be thus brought low by bodily distempers, let us not think it strange; the body is like grass, weak and of the earth, no wonder then that it withers.

2. He was very melancholy and of a sorrowful spirit. He was so taken up with the thoughts of his troubles that he *forgot to eat his bread* (v. 4); he had no appetite to his necessary food nor could he relish it. When God hides his face from a soul the delights of sense will be sapless things. He was always *sighing* and *groaning*, as one pressed above measure (v. 5), and this wasted him and exhausted his spirits. He affected solitude, as melancholy people do. His friends deserted him and were shy of him, and he cared as little for their company (v. 6, 7): “*I am like a pelican of the wilderness, or a bittern* (so some) *that make a doleful noise; I am like an owl*, that affects to lodge in deserted ruined buildings; *I watch, and am as a sparrow upon the house-top.* I live in a garret, and there spend my hours in poring on my troubles and bemoaning myself.” Those who do thus, when they are in sorrow, humour themselves indeed; but they prejudice themselves, and know not what they do, nor what advantage they hereby give to the tempter. In affliction we should sit alone to consider our ways (²⁰⁸Lamentations 3:28), but not sit alone to indulge an inordinate grief.

3. He was evil-spoken of by his enemies, and all manner of evil was said against him. When his friends went off from him his foes set themselves against him (v. 8): *My enemies reproach me all the day*, designing thereby both to create vexation to him (for an ingenuous mind regrets reproach)

and to bring an odium upon him before men. When they could not otherwise reach him they shot these arrows at him, even *bitter words*. In this they were unwearied; they did it *all the day*; it was a continual dropping. His enemies were very outrageous: *They are mad against me*, and very obstinate and implacable. *They are sworn against me*; as the Jews that bound themselves with an oath that they would kill Paul; or, *They have sworn against me* as accusers, to take away my life.

4. He fasted and wept under the tokens of God's displeasure (v. 9, 10): "*I have eaten ashes like bread*; instead of eating my bread, I have lain down in dust and ashes, and *I have mingled my drink with weeping*; when I should have refreshed myself with drinking I have only eased myself with weeping." And what is the matter? He tells us (v. 10): *Because of thy wrath*. It was not so much the trouble itself that troubled him as the wrath of God which he was under the apprehensions of as the cause of the trouble. This, this was the *wormwood and the gall* in the affliction and the misery: *Thou hast lifted me up and cast me down*, as that which we cast to the ground with a design to dash it to pieces; we lift up first, that we may throw it down with the more violence; or, "Thou hast formerly lifted me up in honour, and joy, and uncommon prosperity; but the remembrance of that aggravates the present grief and makes it the more grievous." We must eye the hand of God both in lifting us up and casting us down, and say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord, who both gives and takes away." 5. He looked upon himself as a dying man: *My days are consumed like smoke* (v. 3), which vanishes away quickly. Or, *They are consumed in smoke*, of which nothing remains; they are *like a shadow that declines* (v. 11), like the evening-shadow, or a forerunner of approaching night. Now all this, though it seems to speak the psalmist's personal calamities, and therefore is properly a prayer for a particular person afflicted, yet is supposed to be a description of the afflictions of the church of God, with which the psalmist sympathizes, making public grievances his own. The mystical body of Christ is sometimes, like the psalmist's body here, *withered and parched*, nay, like *dead and dry bones*. The church sometimes is forced *into the wilderness*, seems lost, and gives up herself for gone, under the tokens of God's displeasure.

PSALM 102:12-22

THE FUTURE GLORY OF ZION

Many exceedingly great and precious comforts are here thought of, and mustered up, to balance the foregoing complaints; for *unto the upright there arises light in the darkness*, so that, though they are cast down, they are not in despair. It is bad with the psalmist himself, bad with the people of God; but he has many considerations to revive himself with.

I. We are dying creatures, and our interests and comforts are dying, but God is an everliving everlasting God (v. 12): “*My days are like a shadow; there is no remedy; night is coming upon me; but, thou, O Lord! shalt endure for ever.* Our life is transient, but thine is permanent; our friends die, but thou our God diest not; what threatened us cannot touch thee; our names will be written in the dust and buried in oblivion, but *thy remembrance shall be unto all generations; to the end of time, nay, to eternity, thou shalt be known and honoured.*” A good man loves God better than himself, and therefore can balance his own sorrow and death with the pleasing thought of the unchangeable blessedness of the Eternal Mind. God *endures for ever*, his church's faithful patron and protector; and, his honour and perpetual remembrance being very much bound up in her interests, we may be confident that they shall not be neglected.

II. Poor Zion is now in distress, but there will come a time for her relief and succour (v. 13): *Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion.* The hope of deliverance is built upon the goodness of God — “*Thou wilt have mercy upon Zion, for she has become an object of thy pity;*” and upon the power of God — “*Thou shalt arise and have mercy, shalt stir up thyself to do it, shalt do it in contempt of all the opposition made by the church's enemies.*” *The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this.* That which is very encouraging is that there is a time set for the deliverance of the church, which not only will come some time, but will come at the time appointed, the time which Infinite Wisdom has appointed (and therefore it is the best time) and which Eternal Truth has fixed it to, and therefore it is a certain time, and shall not be forgotten nor further adjourned. At the end of seventy years, the time to favour Zion, by delivering her from the daughter of Babylon, was to come, and at length it did come. Zion was now in ruins, that is, the temple that was built in the city of David: the favouring

of Zion is the building of the temple up again, as it is explained, v. 16. This is expected from the favour of God; that will set all to rights, and nothing but that, and therefore Daniel prays (^{2MT}Daniel 9:17), *Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, which is desolate*. The building up of Zion is as great a favour to any people as they can desire. No blessing more desirable to a ruined state than the restoring and re-establishing of their church-privileges. Now this is here wished for and longed for, 1. Because it would be a great rejoicing to Zion's friends (v. 14): *Thy servants take pleasure even in the stones of the temple, though they were thrown down and scattered, and favour the dust, the very rubbish and ruins of it*. Observe here, When the temple was ruined, yet the stones of it were to be had for a new building, and there were those who encouraged themselves with that, for they had a favour even for the dust of it. Those who truly love the church of God love it when it is in affliction as well as when it is in prosperity; and it is a good ground to hope that God will favour the ruins of Zion when he puts it into the heart of his people to favour them, and to show that they do so by their prayers and by their endeavours; as it is also a good plea with God for mercy for Zion that there are those who are so affectionately concerned for her, and are *waiting for the salvation of the Lord*.

2. Because it would have a good influence upon Zion's neighbours, v. 15. It will be a happy means perhaps of their conversion, at least of their conviction; for *so the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord*, shall have high thoughts of him and his people, and even the kings of the earth shall be affected with his glory. They shall have better thoughts of the church of God than they have had, when God by his providence thus puts an honour upon it; they shall be afraid of doing any thing against it when they see God taking its part; nay, they shall say, We will go with you, for we have *seen that God is with you*, ^{3RB}Zechariah 8:23. Thus it is said (Est. 8:17) that *many of the people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them*.

3. Because it would redound to the honour of Zion's God (v. 16): *When the Lord shall build up Zion*. They take it for granted it will be done, for God himself has undertaken it, and *he shall then appear in his glory*; and for that reason all that have made his glory their highest end desire it and pray for it. Note, The edifying of the church will be the glorifying of God, and therefore we may be assured it will be done in the set time. Those that pray in faith, *Father, glorify thy name*, may receive the same answer to that

prayer which was given to Christ himself by a voice from heaven, *I have both glorified it and I will glorify it yet again*, though now for a time it may be eclipsed.

III. The prayers of God's people now seem to be slighted and no notice taken of them, but they will be reviewed and greatly encouraged (v. 17): *He will regard the prayer of the destitute*. It was said (v. 16) that God will *appear in his glory*, such a glory as kings themselves shall *stand in awe of*, v. 15. When great men *appear in their glory* they are apt to look with disdain upon the poor that apply to them; but the great God will not do so. Observe,

1. The meanness of the petitioners; they are the *destitute*. It is an elegant word that is here used, which signifies the heath in the wilderness, a low shrub, or bush, like the hyssop of the wall. They are supposed to be in a low and broken state, enriched with spiritual blessings, but destitute of temporal good things — the poor, the weak, the desolate, the stripped; thus variously is the word rendered; or it may signify that low and broken spirit which God looks for in all that draw nigh to him and which he will graciously look upon. This will bring them to their knees. Destitute people should be praying people, ⁴⁸⁸⁵1 Timothy 5:5.

2. The favour of God to them, notwithstanding their meanness: *He will regard their prayer*, and will look at it, will peruse their petition (⁴⁸⁸⁶2 Chronicles 6:40), and he *will not despise their prayer*. More is implied than is expressed: he will value it and be well pleased with it, and will return an answer of peace to it, which is the greatest honour that can be put upon it. But it is thus expressed because others despise their praying, they themselves fear God will despise it, and he was thought to despise it while their affliction was prolonged and their prayers lay unanswered. When we consider our own meanness and vileness, our darkness and deadness, and the manifold defects in our prayers, we have cause to suspect that our prayers will be received with disdain in heaven; but we are here assured of the contrary, for we have an advocate with the Father, and are under grace, not under the law. This instance of God's favour to his praying people, though they are destitute, will be a lasting encouragement to prayer (v. 18): *This shall be written for the generation to come, that none may despair*, though they be destitute, nor think their prayers forgotten because they have not an answer to them immediately. The experiences of others should be our encouragements to seek unto God and trust in him. And, if

we have the comfort of the experiences of others, it is fit that we should give God the glory of them: *The people who shall be created shall praise the Lord* for what he has done both for them and for their predecessors. Many that are now unborn shall, by reading the history of the church, be wrought upon to turn proselytes. The people that shall be created anew by divine grace, that are a kind of *first-fruits of his creatures*, shall praise the Lord for his answers to their prayers when they were more destitute.

IV. The prisoners under condemnation unjustly seem as sheep appointed for the slaughter, but care shall be taken for their discharge (v. 19, 20): God has *looked down from the height of his sanctuary, from heaven*, where he has prepared his throne, that high place, that holy place; thence did *the Lord behold the earth*, for it is a place of prospect, and nothing on this earth is or can be hidden from his all-seeing eye; he looks down, not to take a view of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, but to do acts of grace, *to hear the groaning of the prisoners* (which we desire to be out of the hearing of), and not only to hear them, but to help them, *to loose those that are appointed to death*, then when there is but a step between them and it. Some understand it of the release of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon. God heard their groaning there as he did when they were in Egypt (^{}Exodus 3:7, 9) and came down to deliver them. God takes notice not only of the prayers of his afflicted people, which are the language of grace, but even of their groans, which are the language of nature. See the divine pity in hearing the prisoner's groans, and the divine power in loosing the prisoner's bonds, even when they are appointed to death and are pinioned and double-shackled. We have an instance in Peter, ^{}Acts 12:6. Such instances as these of the divine condescension and compassion will help,

1. *To declare the name of the Lord in Zion*, and to make it appear that he answers to his name, which he himself proclaimed, *The Lord God, gracious and merciful*; and this declaration of his name in Zion shall be the matter of his praise in Jerusalem, v. 21. If God by his providences declare his name, we must by our acknowledgments of them declare his praise, which ought to be the echo of his name. God will discharge his people that were prisoners and captives in Babylon, *that they may declare his name in Zion*, the place he has chosen to put his name there, *and his praise in Jerusalem*, at their return thither; in the land of their captivity they could not sing the songs of Zion (^{}Psalms 137:3, 4), and God brought them again to Jerusalem in order that they might sing them there.

For this end God gives liberty from bondage (*Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name*, ^{<427>}Psalm 142:7), and life from the dead. *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*, ^{<397>}Psalm 119:175.

2. They will help to draw in others to the worship of God (v. 22): *When the people of God are gathered together at Jerusalem* (as they were after their return out of Babylon) many out of the kingdoms joined with them to *serve the Lord*. This was fulfilled ^{<462>}Ezra 6:21, where we find that not only the children of Israel that had come out of captivity, but many that had *separated themselves from them among the heathen, did keep the feast of unleavened bread with joy*. But it may look further, at the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ in the latter days. Christ has proclaimed *liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that were bound*, that they may declare the name of the Lord in the gospel-church, in which Jews and Gentiles shall unite.

^{<423>}PSALM 102:23-28

HOPING IN GOD'S COMPASSION

We may here observe,

I. The imminent danger that the Jewish church was in of being quite extirpated and cut off by the captivity in Babylon (v. 23): *He weakened my strength in the way*. They were for many ages in the way to the performance of the great promise made to their fathers concerning the Messiah, longing as much for it as ever a traveller did to be at his journey's end. The legal institutions led them in the way; but when the ten tribes were lost in Assyria, and the two almost lost in Babylon, the strength of that nation was weakened, and, in all appearance, its day shortened; for they said, *Our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts*, ^{<371>}Ezekiel 37:11. And then what becomes of the promise that Shiloh should arise out of Judah, the star out of Jacob, and the Messiah out of the family of David? If these fail, the promise fails. This the psalmist speaks of as in his own person, and it is very applicable to two of the common afflictions of this time: —

1. To be sickly. Bodily distempers soon *weaken our strength in the way*, make the keepers of the house to tremble and the strong men to bow themselves.

2. To be short-lived. Where the former is felt, this is feared; when in the midst of our days, according to a course of nature, our strength is weakened, what can we expect but that the *number of our months should be cut off in the midst?* and what should we do but provide accordingly? We must own God's hand in it (for in his hand our strength and time are), and must reconcile it to his love, for it has often been the lot of those that have used their strength well to have it weakened, and of those that could very ill be spared to have their days shortened.

II. A prayer for the continuance of it (v. 24): "*O my God! take me not away in the midst of my days*; let not this poor church be cut off in the midst of the days assigned it by the promise; let it not be cut off till the Messiah shall come. *Destroy it not, for that blessing is in it,*" ^{<368>}Isaiah 65:8. She is a criminal, but, for the sake of that blessing which is in her, she pleads for a reprieve. This is a prayer for the afflicted, and which, with submission to the will of God, we may in faith put up, that God would not *take us away in the midst of our days*, but that, if it be his will, he would spare us to do him further service and to be made riper for heaven.

III. A plea to enforce this prayer taken from the eternity of the Messiah promised, v. 25-27. The apostle quotes these verses (^{<310>}Hebrews 1:10-12) and tells us, *He saith this to the Son*, and in that exposition we must acquiesce. It is very comfortable, in reference to all the changes that pass over the church, and all the dangers it is in, that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Thy years are throughout all generations*, and cannot be shortened. It is likewise comfortable in reference to the decay and death of our own bodies, and the removal of our friends from us, that God is an everliving God, and that therefore, if he be ours, in him we may have everlasting consolation. In this plea observe how, to illustrate the eternity of the Creator, he compares it with the mutability of the creature; for it is God's sole prerogative to be unchangeable.

1. God made the world, and therefore had a being before it from eternity. The Son of God, the eternal Word, made the world. It is expressly said, *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made; and therefore the same was in the beginning from eternity with God, and was God,* ^{<300>}John 1:1-3; ^{<5016>}Colossians 1:16; ^{<409>}Ephesians 3:9;

~~300~~ Hebrews 1:2. Earth and heaven, and the hosts of both, include the universe and its fulness, and these derive their being from God by his Son (v. 25): "*Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth, which is founded on the seas and on the floods and yet it abides; much more shall the church, which is built upon a rock. The heavens are the work of thy hands, and by thee are all their motions and influences directed;*" God is therefore the fountain, not only of all being, but of all power and dominion. See how fit the great Redeemer is to be entrusted with all power, both in heaven and in earth, since he himself, as Creator of both, perfectly knows both and is entitled to both.

2. God will unmake the world again, and therefore shall have a being to eternity (v. 26, 27): *They shall perish, for thou shalt change them* by the same almighty power that made them, and therefore, no doubt, *thou shalt endure; thou art the same.* God and the world, Christ and the creature, are rivals for the innermost and uppermost place in the soul of man, the immortal soul; now what is here said, one would think, were enough to decide the controversy immediately and to determine us for God and Christ. For,

(1.) A portion in the creature is fading and dying: *They shall perish*; they will not last so long as we shall last. The day is coming when *the earth and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up*; and then what will become of those that have laid up their treasure in it? Heaven and earth shall *wax old as a garment*, not by a gradual decay, but, when the set time comes, they shall be laid aside like an old garment that we have no more occasion for: *As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed*, not annihilated, but altered, it may be so that they shall not be at all the same, but *new heavens and a new earth*. See God's sovereign dominion over heaven and earth. He can change them as he pleases and when he pleases; and the constant changes they are subject to, in the revolutions of day and night, summer and winter, are earnest of their last and final change, when *the heavens and time* (which is measured by them) *shall be no more*.

(2.) A portion in God is perpetual and everlasting: *Thou art the same*, subject to no change; and *thy years have no end*, v. 27. Christ will be the same in the performance that he was in the promise, the same to his church in captivity that he was to his church at liberty. Let not the church fear the weakening of her strength, or the shortening of her days, while

Christ himself is both her strength and her life; he is the same, and has said, *Because I live you shall live also*. Christ came in the fulness of time, and set up his kingdom in spite of the power of the Old-Testament Babylon, and he will keep it up in spite of the power of the New-Testament Babylon.

IV. A comfortable assurance of an answer to this prayer (v. 28): *The children of thy servants shall continue*; since Christ is the same, the church shall continue from one generation to another; from the eternity of the head we may infer the perpetuity of the body, though often weak and distempered, and even at death's door. Those that hope to *wear out the saints of the Most High* will be mistaken. Christ's servants shall have children; those children shall have a seed, a succession, of professing people; the church, as well as the world, is under the influence of that blessing, *Be fruitful and multiply*. These *children shall continue*, not in their own persons, by reason of death, but in their seed, which shall be established before God (that is, in his service, and by his grace); the entail of religion shall not be cut off while the world stands, but, as one generation of good people passes away, another shall come, and thus the throne of Christ shall endure.