

PSALM 142

This psalm is a prayer, the substance of which David offered up to God when he was forced by Saul to take shelter in a cave, and which he afterwards penned in this form. Here is,

- I.** The complaint he makes to God (v. 1, 2) of the subtlety, strength, and malice, of his enemies (v. 3, 6), and the coldness and indifference of his friends (v. 4).
- II.** The comfort he takes in God that he knew his case (v. 3) and was his refuge (v. 5).
- III.** His expectation from God that he would hear and deliver him (v. 6, 7). **IV.** His expectation from the righteous that they would join with him in praises (v. 7). Those that are troubled in mind, body, or estate, may, in singing this psalm (if they sing it in some measure with David's spirit), both warrant his complaints and fetch in his comforts.

PSALM 142:1-3

COMPLAINTS AND PETITIONS

Maschil of David. A prayer when he was in the cave.

Whether it was in the cave of *Adullam*, or that of *Engedi*, that David prayed this prayer, is not material; it is plain that he was in distress. It was a great disgrace to so great a soldier, so great a courtier, to be put to such shifts for his own safety, and a great terror to be so hotly pursued and every moment in expectation of death; yet then he had such a presence of mind as to pray this prayer, and, wherever he was, still had his religion about him. Prayers and tears were his weapons, and, when he durst not stretch forth his hands against his prince, he lifted them up to his God. There is no cave so deep, so dark, but we may out of it send up our prayers, and our souls in prayer, to God. He calls this prayer *Maschil* — a *psalm of instruction*, because of the good lessons he had himself learnt in the cave, learnt on his knees, which he desired to teach others. In these verses observe,

I. How David complained to God, v. 1, 2. When the danger was over he was not ashamed to own (as great spirits sometimes are) the fright he had been in and the application he had made to God. Let no men of the first rank think it any diminution or disparagement to them, when they are in affliction, to cry to God, and to cry like children to their parents when any thing frightens them. *David poured out his complaint*, which denotes a free and full complaint; he was copious and particular in it. His heart was as full of his grievances as it could hold, but he made himself easy by pouring them out before the Lord; and this he did with great fervency: *He cried unto the Lord with his voice*, with the voice of his mind (so some think), for, being hidden in the cave, he durst not speak with an audible voice, lest that should betray him; but mental prayer is vocal to God, and he hears the groanings which cannot, or dare not, be uttered, ~~4185~~ Romans 8:26. Two things David laid open to God, in this complaint: —

1. His distress. He exhibited a remonstrance or memorial of his case: *I showed before him my trouble*, and all the circumstances of it. He did not prescribe to God, nor show him his trouble, as if God did not know it without his showing; but as one that put a confidence in God, desired to keep up communion with him, and was willing to refer himself entirely to him, he unbosomed himself to him, humbly laid the matter before him, and then cheerfully left it with him. We are apt to show our trouble too much to ourselves, aggravating it, and poring upon it, which does us no service, whereas by showing it to God we might cast the care upon him who careth for us, and thereby ease ourselves. Nor should we allow of any complaint to ourselves or others which we cannot with due decency and sincerity of devotion make to God, and stand to before him.

2. His desire. When he made his complaint he *made his supplication* (v. 1), not claiming relief as a debt, but humbly begging it as a favour. Complainants must be suppliants, for God will be sought unto.

II. What he complained of: “*In the way wherein I walked, suspecting no danger, have they privily laid a snare for me, to entrap me.*” Saul gave Michal his daughter to David on purpose that she might be *a snare to him*, ~~4182~~ 1 Samuel 18:21. This he complains of to God, that every thing was done with a design against him. If he had gone out of his way, and met with snares, he might have thanked himself; but when he met with them in the way of his duty he might with humble boldness tell God of them.

III. What comforted him in the midst of these complaints (v. 3): “*When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, and ready to sink under the burden of grief and fear, when I was quite at a loss and ready to despair, then thou knewest my path, that is, then it was a pleasure to me to think that thou knewest it. Thou knewest my sincerity, the right path which I have walked in, and that I am not such a one as my persecutors represent me. Thou knewest my condition in all the particulars of it; when my spirit was so overwhelmed that I could not distinctly show it, this comforted me, that thou knewest it,* ^{<K&O>}Job 23:10. *Thou knewest it, that is, thou didst protect, preserve, and secure it,*” ^{<B&T>}Psalm 31:7; ^{<B&T>}Deuteronomy 2:7.

^{<B&T>}PSALM 142:4-7

DAVID'S COMPLAINTS

The psalmist here tells us, for our instruction,

1. How he was disowned and deserted by his friends, v. 4. When he was in favour at court he seemed to have a great interest, but when he was made an out-law, and it was dangerous for any one to harbour him (witness Ahimelech's fate), then *no man would know him*, but every body was shy of him. He looked *on his right hand* for an advocate (^{<B&T>}Psalm 109:31), some friend or other to speak a good word for him; but, since Jonathan's appearing for him had like to have cost him his life, nobody was willing to venture in defence of his innocency, but all were ready to say they knew nothing of the matter. He looked round to see if any would open their doors to him; but *refuge failed him*. None of all his old friends would give him a night's lodging, or direct him to any place of secrecy and safety. How many good men have been deceived by such swallow-friends, who are gone when winter comes! David's life was exceedingly precious, and yet, when he was unjustly proscribed, *no man cared for it*, nor would move a hand for the protection of it. Herein he was a type of Christ, who, in his sufferings for us, was forsaken of all men, even of his own disciples, and trod the wine-press alone, for there was *none to help, none to uphold,* ^{<B&T>}Isaiah 63:5.

2. How he then found satisfaction in God, v. 5. Lovers and friends stood aloof from him, and it was in vain to call to them. “But,” said he, “*I cried unto thee, O Lord! who knowest me, and carest for me, when none else*

will, and wilt not fail me nor forsake me when men do;" for God is constant in his love. David tells us what he said to God in the cave: "*Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living; I depend upon thee to be so, my refuge to save me from being miserable, my portion to make me happy. The cave I am in is but a poor refuge. Lord, thy name is the strong tower that I run into. Thou art my refuge, in whom alone I shall think myself safe. The crown I am in hopes of is but a poor portion; I can never think myself well provided for till I know that the Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup.*" Those who in sincerity take the Lord for their God shall find him all-sufficient both as a refuge and as a portion, so that, as no evil shall hurt them, so no good shall be wanting to them; and they may humbly claim their interest: "*Lord, thou art my refuge and my portion; every thing else is a refuge of lies and a portion of no value. Thou art so in the land of the living, that is, while I live and have my being, whether in this world or in a better.*" There is enough in God to answer all the necessities of this present time. We live in a world of dangers and wants; but what danger need we fear if God is our refuge, or what wants if he be our portion? Heaven, which alone deserves to be called *the land of the living*, will be to all believers both a refuge and a portion.

3. How, in this satisfaction, he addressed himself to God (v. 5, 6): "Lord, give a gracious *ear to my cry*, the cry of my affliction, the cry of my supplication, for *I am brought very low*, and, if thou help me not, I shall be quite sunk. Lord, *deliver me from my persecutors*, either tie their hands or turn their hearts, break their power or blast their projects, restrain them or rescue me, *for they are stronger than I*, and it will be thy honour to take part with the weakest. Deliver me from them, or I shall be ruined by them, for I am not yet myself a match for them. Lord, *bring my soul out of prison*, not only bring me safe out of this cave, but bring me out of all my perplexities." We may apply it spiritually: the souls of good men are often straitened by doubts and fears, cramped and fettered through the weakness of faith and the prevalency of corruption; and it is then their duty and interest to apply themselves to God, and beg of him to set them at liberty and to enlarge their hearts, that they may *run the way of his commandments*.

4. How much he expected his deliverance would redound to the glory of God.

(1.) By his own thanksgivings, into which his present complaints would then be turned: “*Bring my soul out of prison, not that I may enjoy myself and my friends and live at ease, no, nor that I may secure my country, but that I may praise thy name.*” This we should have an eye to, in all our prayers to God for deliverance out of trouble, that we may have occasion to praise God and may live to his praise. This is the greatest comfort of temporal mercies that they furnish us with matter, and give us opportunity, for the excellent duty of praise.

(2.) By the thanksgivings of many on his behalf (☞ 2 Corinthians 1:11): “When I am enlarged *the righteous shall encompass me about; for my cause they shall make thee a crown of praise, so the Chaldee. They shall flock about me to congratulate me on my deliverance, to hear my experiences, and to receive (Maschil) instructions from me; they shall encompass me, to join with me in my thanksgivings, because thou shalt have dealt bountifully with me.*” Note, The mercies of others ought to be the matter of our praises to God; and the praises of others, on our behalf, ought to be both desired and rejoiced in by us.