

# PSALM 41

God's kindness and truth have often been the support and comfort of the saints when they have had most experience of man's unkindness and treachery. David here found them so, upon a sick-bed; he found his enemies very barbarous, but his God very gracious.

**I.** He here comforts himself in his communion with God under his sickness, by faith receiving and laying hold of God's promises to him (v 1-3) and lifting up his heart in prayer to God (v. 4).

**II.** He here represents the malice of his enemies against him, their malicious censures of him, their spiteful reflections upon him, and their insolent conduct towards him (v. 5-9).

**III.** He leaves his case with God, not doubting but that he would own and favour him (v. 10-12), and so the psalm concludes with a doxology (v. 13). Is any afflicted with sickness? let him sing the beginning of this psalm. Is any persecuted by enemies? let him sing the latter end of it; and we may any of us, in singing it, meditate upon both the calamities and comforts of good people in this world.

## PSALM 41:1-4

### PROMISES TO THOSE WHO CONSIDER THE POOR

*To the chief musician. A psalm of David.*

In these verses we have,

**I.** God's promises of succour and comfort to those that consider the poor; and,

**1.** We may suppose that David makes mention of these with application either,

**(1.)** To his friends, who were kind to him, and very considerate of his case, now that he was in affliction: *Blessed is he that considers poor David.*

Here and there he met with one that sympathized with him, and was concerned for him, and kept up his good opinion of him and respect for him, notwithstanding his afflictions, while his enemies were so insolent and abusive to him; on these he pronounced this blessing, not doubting but that God would recompense to them all the kindness they had done him, particularly when they also came to be in affliction. The provocations which his enemies gave him did but endear his friends so much the more to him. Or,

(2.) To himself. He had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had considered the poor, that when he was in honour and power at court he had taken cognizance of the wants and miseries of the poor and had provided for their relief, and therefore was sure God would, according to his promise, strengthen and comfort him in his sickness.

2. We must regard them more generally with application to ourselves. Here is a comment upon that promise, *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*. Observe,

(1.) What the mercy is which is required of us. It is to consider the poor or afflicted, whether in mind, body, or estate. These we are to consider with prudence and tenderness; we must take notice of their affliction and enquire into their state, must sympathize with them and judge charitably concerning them. We must wisely consider the poor; that is, we must ourselves be instructed by the poverty and affliction of others; it must be *Maschil* to us, that is the word here used.

(2.) What the mercy is that is promised to us if we thus show mercy. He that considers the poor (if he cannot relieve them, yet he considers them, and has a compassionate concern for them, and in relieving them acts considerately and with discretion) shall be considered by his God: he shall not only be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, but he *shall be blessed upon the earth* This branch of godliness, as much as any, has the promise of the life that now is and is usually recompensed with temporal blessings. Liberality to the poor is the surest and safest way of thriving; such as practise it may be sure of seasonable and effectual relief from God,

[1.] In all troubles: He *will deliver them in the day of evil*, so that when the times are at the worst it shall go well with them, and they shall not fall into the calamities in which others are involved; if any be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger, *they* shall. Those who thus distinguish themselves from

those that have hard hearts God will distinguish from those that have hard usage. Are they in danger? he will preserve and keep them alive; and those who have a thousand times forfeited their lives, as the best have, must acknowledge it as a great favour if they have their *lives given them for a prey*. He does not say, “They shall be preferred,” but, “*They shall be preserved and kept alive*, when the arrows of death fly thickly round about them.” Do their enemies threaten them? God will not *deliver them into the will of their enemies*; and the most potent enemy we have can have no power against us but what is given him from above. The good-will of a God that loves us is sufficient to secure us from the ill-will of all that hate us, men and devils; and that good-will we may promise ourselves an interest in if we have considered the poor and helped to relieve and rescue them.

[2.] Particularly in sickness (v. 3): *The Lord will strengthen him*, both in body and mind, *upon the bed of languishing*, on which he had long lain sick, and *he will make all his bed* — a very condescending expression, alluding to the care of those that nurse and tend sick people, especially of mothers for their children when they are sick, which is to make their beds easy for them; and that bed must needs be well made which God himself has the making of. He will make all his bed from head to foot, so that no part shall be uneasy; he will *turn* his bed (so the word is), to shake it up and make it very easy; or he will turn it into a bed of health. Note, God has promised his people that he will strengthen them, and make them easy, under their bodily pains and sicknesses. He has not promised that they shall never be sick, nor that they shall not lie long languishing, nor that their sickness shall not be unto death; but he has promised to enable them to bear their affliction with patience, and cheerfully to wait the issue. The soul shall by his grace be made to dwell at ease when the body lies in pain.

**II.** David's prayer, directed and encouraged by these promises (v. 4): *I said, Heal my soul*. It is good for us to keep some account of our prayers, that we may not unsay, in our practices, any thing that we said in our prayers. Here is,

**1.** His humble petition: *Lord be merciful to me*. He appeals to mercy, as one that knew he could not stand the test of strict justice. The best saints, even those that have been merciful to the poor, have not made God their debtor, but must throw themselves on his mercy. When we are under the rod we must thus recommend ourselves to the tender mercy of our God:

*Lord, heal my soul.* Sin is the sickness of the soul; pardoning mercy heals it; renewing grace heals it; and this spiritual healing we should be more earnest for than for bodily health.

**2.** His penitent confession: *“I have sinned against thee, and therefore my soul needs healing. I am a sinner, a miserable sinner; therefore, God be merciful to me,”* ~~(41:3)~~ Luke 18:13. It does not appear that this has reference to any particular gross act of sin, but, in general, to his many sins of infirmity, which his sickness set in order before him, and the dread of the consequences of which made him pray, *Heal my soul.*

## ~~(41:5)~~ PSALM 41:5-13

### COMPLAINTS AND CONSOLATIONS

David often complains of the insolent conduct of his enemies towards him when he was sick, which, as it was very barbarous in them, so it could not but be very grievous to him. They had not indeed arrived at that modern pitch of wickedness of poisoning his meat and drink, or giving him something to make him sick; but, when he was sick, they insulted over him (v. 5): *My enemies speak evil of me*, designing thereby to grieve his spirit, to ruin his reputation, and so to sink his interest. Let us enquire,

**I.** What was the conduct of his enemies towards him.

**1.** They longed for his death: *When shall he die, and his name perish* with him? He had but an uncomfortable life, and yet they grudged him that. But it was a useful life; he was, upon all accounts, the greatest ornament and blessing of his country; and yet, it seems, there were some who were sick of him, as the Jews were of Paul, crying out, *Away with such a fellow from the earth.* We ought not to desire the death of any; but to desire the death of useful men, for their usefulness, has much in it of the venom of the old serpent. They envied him his name, and the honour he had won, and doubted not but, if he were dead, that would be laid in the dust with him; yet see how they were mistaken: when he had served his generation he did die (~~(41:36)~~ Acts 13:36), but did his name perish? No; it lives and flourishes to this day in the sacred writings, and will to the end of time; for *the memory of the just is, and shall be, blessed.*

2. They picked up every thing they could to reproach him with (v. 6): “*If he come to see me*” (as it has always been reckoned a piece of neighbourly kindness to visit the sick) “*he speaks vanity*; that is, he pretends friendship, and that his errand is to mourn with me and to comfort me; he tells me he is very sorry to see me so much indisposed, and wishes me my health; but it is all flattery and falsehood.” We complain, and justly, of the want of sincerity in our days, and that there is scarcely any true friendship to be found among men; but it seems, by this, that the former days were no better than these. David's friends were all compliment, and had nothing of that affection for him in their hearts which they made profession of. Nor was that the worst of it; it was upon a mischievous design that they came to see him, that they might make invidious remarks upon every thing he said or did, and might represent it as they pleased to others, with their own comments upon it, so as to render him odious or ridiculous: *His heart gathereth iniquity to itself*, puts ill constructions upon every thing; and the, when he goes among his companions, he tells it to them, that they may tell it to others. *Report, say they, and we will report it,* <sup>200</sup>Jeremiah 20:10. If he complained much of his illness, they would reproach him for his pusillanimity; if he scarcely complained at all, they would reproach him for his stupidity. If he prayed, or gave them good counsel, they would banter it, and call it *canting*; if he kept silence from good, when the wicked were before him, they would say that he had forgotten his religion now that he was sick. There is no fence against those whose malice thus gathers iniquity.

3. They promised themselves that he would never recover from this sickness, nor ever wipe off the odium with which they had loaded him. They *whispered together against him* (v. 7), speaking that secretly in one another's ears which they could not for shame speak out, and which, if they did, they knew would be confuted. Whisperers and backbiters are put together among the worst of sinners, <sup>201</sup>Romans 1:29, 30. They whispered, that their plot against him might not be discovered and so defeated; there is seldom whispering (we say) but there is lying, or some mischief on foot. Those whisperers devised evil to David. Concluding he would die quickly, they contrived how to break all the measures he had concerted for the public good, to prevent the prosecution of them, and to undo all that he had hitherto been doing. This he calls *devising hurt against him*; and they doubted not but to gain their point: *An evil disease (a thing of Belial)*, say they, *cleaves fast to him*. The reproach with which they had loaded his

name, they hoped, would cleave so fast to it that it would perish with him, and then they should gain their point. They went by a modern maxim, *Fortiter calumniari, aliquid adhaerebit* — *Fling an abundance of calumny, and some will be sure to stick*. “The disease he is now under will certainly make an end of him; for it is the punishment of some great enormous crime, which he will not be brought to repent of, and proves him, however he has appeared, a son of Belial.” Or, “It is inflicted by Satan, who is called *Belial*,” *the wicked one*, <sup><415></sup>2 Corinthians 6:15. “*It is*” (according to a loose way of speaking some have) “a devilish disease, and therefore it will *cleave fast to him*; and *now that he lieth*, now that his distemper prevails so far as to oblige him to keep his bed, *he shall rise up no more*; we shall get rid of him, and divide the spoil of his preferments.” We are not to think it strange if, when good men are sick, there be those that fear it, which makes the world not worthy of them, <sup><610></sup>Revelation 11:10.

4. There was one particularly, in whom he had reposed a great deal of confidence, that took part with his enemies and was as abusive to him as any of them (v. 9): *My own familiar friend*; probably he means Ahithophel, who had been his bosom-friend and prime-minister of state, in whom he trusted as one inviolably firm to him, whose advice he relied much upon in dealing with his enemies, and who *did eat of his bread*, that is, with whom he had been very intimate and whom he had taken to sit at the table with him, nay, whom he had maintained and given a livelihood to, and so obliged, both in gratitude and interest, to adhere to him. Those that had their *maintenance from the king's palace* did not think it *meet for them to see the king's dishonour* (<sup><104></sup>Ezra 4:14), much less to do him dishonour. Yet this base and treacherous confidant of David's forgot all the eaten bread, and *lifted up his heel against him* that had lifted up his head; not only deserted him, but insulted him, kicked at him, endeavoured to supplant him. Those are wicked indeed whom no courtesy done them, nor confidence reposed in them, will oblige; and let us not think it strange if we receive abuses from such: David did, and the Son of David; for of Judas the traitor David here, in the Spirit, spoke; our Saviour himself so expounds this, and *therefore* gave Judas the sop, that the scripture might be fulfilled, *He that eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me*, <sup><133></sup>John 13:18, 16. Nay, have not we ourselves behaved thus perfidiously and disingenuously towards God? We *eat of his bread* daily, and yet *lift up*

*the heel against him, as Jeshurun, that waxed fat and kicked,*

Deuteronomy 32:15.

**II.** How did David bear this insolent ill-natured conduct of his enemies towards him?

**1.** He prayed to God that they might be disappointed. He said nothing to them, but turned himself to God: *O Lord! be thou merciful to me*, for they are unmerciful, v. 10. He had prayed in reference to the insults of his enemies, *Lord, be merciful to me*, for this is a prayer which will suit every case. God's mercy has in it a redress for every grievance, "They endeavour to run me down, but, Lord, do thou raise me up from this bed of languishing, from which they think I shall never arise. Raise me up *that I may requite them*, that I may render them good for evil" (so some), for that was David's practice, <sup>Psalm</sup> Psalm 7:4; 35:13. A good man will even wish for an opportunity of making it to appear that he bears no malice to those that have been injurious to him, but, on the contrary, that he is ready to do them any good office. Or, "That, as a king, I may put them under the marks of my just displeasure, banish them the court, and forbid them my table for the future," which would be a necessary piece of justice, for warning to others. Perhaps in this prayer is couched a prophecy of the exaltation of Christ, whom God raised up, that he might be a just avenger of all the wrongs done to him and to his people, particularly by the Jews, whose utter destruction followed not long after.

**2.** He assured himself that they would be disappointed (v. 11): "*By this I know that thou favourest me* and my interest, *because my enemy doth not triumph over me.*" They hoped for his death, but he found himself, through mercy, recovering, and this would add to the comfort of his recovery,

**(1.)** That it would be a disappointment to his adversaries; they would be crest-fallen and wretchedly ashamed, and there would be no occasion to upbraid them with their disappointment; they would fret at it themselves. Note. Though we may not take a pleasure in the fall of our enemies, we may take a pleasure in the frustrating of their designs against us.

**(2.)** That it would be a token of God's favour to him, and a certain evidence that he did favour him, and would continue to do so. Note. When we can discern the favour of God to us in any mercy, personal or public, that doubles it and sweetens it.

**3.** He depended upon God, who had thus delivered him from many an evil work, to *preserve him to his heavenly kingdom*, as blessed Paul, <sup>STHS-2</sup> Timothy 4:18. “As for me, forasmuch as thou favourest me, as a fruit of that favour, and to qualify me for the continuance of it, *thou upholdest me in my integrity, and, in order to that, settest me before thy face*, hast thy eye always upon me for good;” or, “Because thou dost, by thy grace, uphold me in my integrity, I know that thou wilt, in thy glory, set me for ever before thy face.” Note,

**(1.)** When at any time we suffer in our reputation our chief concern should be about our integrity, and then we may cheerfully leave it to God to secure our reputation. David knows that, if he can but persevere in his integrity, he needs not fear his enemies' triumphs over him.

**(2.)** The best man in the world holds his integrity no longer than God upholds him in it; for by his grace we are what we are; if we be left to ourselves, we shall not only fall, but fall away.

**(3.)** It is a great comfort to us that, however weak we are, God is able to uphold us in our integrity, and will do it if we commit the keeping of it to him.

**(4.)** If the grace of God did not take a constant care of us, we should not be upheld in our integrity; his eye is always upon us, else we should soon start aside from him.

**(5.)** Those whom God now upholds in their integrity he will set before his face for ever, and make happy in the vision and fruition of himself. *He that endures to the end shall be saved.*

**4.** The psalm concludes with a solemn doxology, or adoration of God as *the Lord God of Israel*, v. 13. It is not certain whether this verse pertains to this particular psalm (if so, it teaches us this, That a believing hope of our preservation through grace to glory is enough to fill our hearts with joy and our mouths with everlasting praise, even in our greatest straits) or whether it was added as the conclusion of the first book of *Psalms*, which is reckoned to end here (the like being subjoined to Psalm 72, 89, 106), and then it teaches us to make God the Omega who is the Alpha, to make him the end who is the beginning of every good work. We are taught,

- (1.) To give glory to God as the *Lord God of Israel*, a God in covenant with his people, who has done great and kind things for them and has more and better in reserve.
- (2.) To give him glory as an eternal God, that has both his being and his blessedness *from everlasting and to everlasting*.
- (3.) To do this with great affection and fervour of spirit, intimated in the double seal set to it — *Amen, and Amen*. Be it so now, be it so to all eternity. We say *Amen* to it, and let all others say *Amen* too.