

PSALM 71

David penned this psalm in his old age, as appears by several passages in it, which makes many think that it was penned at the time of Absalom's rebellion; for that was the great trouble of his later days. It might be occasioned by Sheba's insurrection, or some trouble that happened to him in that part of his life of which it was foretold that the sword should not depart from his house. But he is not over-particular in representing his case, because he intended it for the general use of God's people in their afflictions, especially those they meet with in their declining years; for this psalm, above any other, is fitted for the use of the old disciples of Jesus Christ.

I. He begins the psalm with believing prayers, with prayers that God would deliver him and save him (v. 2, 4), and not cast him off (v. 9) or be far from him (v. 12), and that his enemies might be put to shame (v. 13). He pleads his confidence in God (v. 1, 3, 5, 7), the experience he had had of help from God (v. 6), and the malice of his enemies against him (v. 10, 11).

II. He concludes the psalm with believing praises (v. 14, etc.). Never was his hope more established (v. 16, 18, 20, 21). Never were his joys and thanksgivings more enlarged (v. 15, 19, 22-24). He is in an ecstasy of joyful praise; and, in the singing of it, we too should have our faith in God encouraged and our hearts raised in blessing his holy name.

PSALM 71:1-13

BELIEVING PRAYERS

Two things in general David here prays for — that he might not be confounded and that his enemies and persecutors might be confounded.

I. He prays that he might never be made ashamed of his dependence upon God nor disappointed in his believing expectations from him. With this petition every true believer may come boldly to the throne of grace; for God will never disappoint the hope that is of his own raising. Now observe here,

1. How David professes his confidence in God, and with what pleasure and grateful variety of expression he repeats his profession of that confidence, still presenting the profession of it to God and pleading it with him. We praise God, and so please him, by telling him (if it be indeed true) what an entire confidence we have in him (v. 1): "*In thee, O Lord!* and in thee only, *do I put my trust*. Whatever others do, I choose the God of Jacob for my help." Those that are entirely satisfied with God's all-sufficiency and the truth of his promise, and in dependence upon that, as sufficient to make them amends, are freely willing to do and suffer, to lose and venture, for him, may truly say, *In thee, O Lord! do I put my trust*. Those that will deal with God must deal upon trust; if we are shy of dealing with him, it is a sign we do not trust him. *Thou art my rock and my fortress* (v. 3); and again, "*Thou art my refuge, my strong refuge*" (v. 7); that is, "I fly to thee, and am sure to be safe in thee, and under thy protection. If thou secure me, none can hurt me. *Thou art my hope and my trust*" (v. 5); that is, "thou hast proposed thyself to me in thy word as the proper object of my hope and trust; I have hoped in thee, and never found it in vain to do so."

2. How his confidence in God is supported and encouraged by his experiences (v. 5, 6): "*Thou hast been my trust from my youth*; ever since I was capable of discerning between my right hand and my left, I stayed myself upon thee, and saw a great deal of reason to do so; for *by thee have I been holden up from the womb*." Ever since he had the use of his reason he had been a dependent upon God's goodness, because ever since he had had a being he had been a monument of it. Note, The consideration of the gracious care which the divine Providence took of us in our birth and infancy should engage us to an early piety and constant devotedness to his honour. He that was our help from our birth ought to be our hope from our youth. If we received so much mercy from God before we were capable of doing him any service, we should lose no time when we are capable. This comes in here as a support to the psalmist in his present distress; not only that God had given him his life and being, bringing him out of his mother's bowels into the world, and providing that he should not die from the womb, nor give up the ghost when he came out of the belly, but that he had betimes made him one of his family: "Thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels into the arms of thy grace, under the shadow of thy wings, into the bond of thy covenant; thou tookest me into thy church, as a

son of thy handmaid, and born in thy house, ⁴¹³⁶Psalm 116:16. And therefore,”

(1.) “I have reason to hope that thou wilt protect me; thou that hast held me up hitherto wilt not let me fall now; thou that madest me wilt not forsake the work of thy own hands; thou that helpedst me when I could not help myself wilt not abandon me now that I am as helpless as I was then.”

(2.) “Therefore I have reason to resolve that I will devote myself unto thee: *My praise shall therefore be continually of thee;*” that is, “I will make it my business every day to praise thee and will take all occasions to do it.”

3. What his requests to God are, in this confidence.

(1.) That he might *never be put to confusion* (v. 1), that he might not be disappointed of the mercy he expected and so made ashamed of his expectation. Thus we may all pray in faith that our confidence in God may not be our confusion. Hope of the glory of God is hope that makes not ashamed.

(2.) That he might be delivered out of the hand of his enemies (v. 2): “*Deliver me in thy righteousness.* As thou art the righteous Judge of the world, pleading the cause of the injured and punishing the injurious, cause me in some way or other to escape” (God will, with the temptation, make a way to escape, ⁴¹³⁷1 Corinthians 10:13): “*Incline thy ear unto my prayers,* and, in answer to them, save me out of my troubles, v. 4. Deliver me, O my God! out of the hands of those that are ready to pull me in pieces.” Three things he pleads for deliverance: —

[1.] The encouragement God had given him to expect it: *Thou hast given commandment to save me* (v. 3); that is, thou hast promised to do it, and such efficacy is there in God's promises that they are often spoken of as commands, like that, *Let there be light, and there was light.* He speaks, and it is done.

[2.] The character of his enemies; they are *wicked, unrighteous, cruel men,* and it will be for the honour of God to appear against them (v. 4), for he is a holy, just, and good God.

[3.] The many eyes that were upon him (v. 7): “*I am as a wonder unto many;* every one waits to see what will be the issue of such extraordinary troubles as I have fallen into and such extraordinary confidence as I

profess to have in God.” Or, “I am looked upon as a monster, am one whom every body shuns, and therefore am undone if the Lord be not my refuge. Men abandon me, but God will not.”

(3.) That he might always find rest and safety in God (v. 3): *Be thou my strong habitation; by thou to me a rock of repose, whereto I may continually resort.* Those that are at home in God, that live a life of communion with him and confidence in him, that continually resort unto him by faith and prayer, having their eyes ever towards him, may promise themselves a strong habitation in him, such as will never fall of itself nor can ever be broken through by any invading power; and they shall be welcome to resort to him continually upon all occasions, and not be upbraided as coming too often.

(4.) That he might have continual matter for thanksgiving to God, and might be continually employed in that pleasant work (v. 8): “*Let my mouth be filled with thy praise,* as now it is with my complaints, and then I shall not be ashamed of my hope, but my enemies will be ashamed of their insolence.” Those that love God love to be praising him, and desire to be doing it all the day, not only in their morning and evening devotions, not only *seven times a day* (~~119:164~~ Psalm 119:164), but *all the day*, to intermix with all they say something or other that may redound to the honour and praise of God. They resolve to do it while they live; they hope to be doing it eternally in a better world.

(5.) That he might not be neglected now in his declining years (v. 9): *Cast me not off now in the time of my old gage; forsake me not when my strength fails.* Observe here,

[1.] The natural sense he had of the infirmities of age: *My strength fails.* Where there was strength of body and vigour of mind, strong sight, a strong voice, strong limbs, alas! in old age they fail; the life is continued, but the strength is gone, or that which is his *labour and sorrow*, ~~90:10~~ Psalm 90:10.

[2.] The gracious desire he had of the continuance of God's presence with him under these infirmities: *Lord, cast me not off; do not then forsake me.* This intimates that he should look upon himself as undone if God should abandon him. To be cast off and forsaken of God is a thing to be dreaded at any time, especially in the time of old age and when our strength fails us; for it is God that is the strength of our heart. But it intimates that he

had reason to hope God would not desert him; the faithful servants of God may be comfortably assured that he will not cast them off in old age, nor forsake them when their strength fails them. He is a Master that is not wont to cast off old servants. In this confidence David here prays again (v. 12): “*O God! be not far from me; let me not be under the apprehension of thy withdrawals, for then I am miserable. I my God! a God in covenant with me, make haste for my help, lest I perish before help come.*”

II. He prays that his enemies might be made ashamed of their designs against him. Observe, 1. What it was which they unjustly said against him, v. 10, 11. Their plot was deep and desperate; it was against his life: *They lay wait for my soul* (v. 10), and are adversaries to that, v. 13. Their powers and policies were combined: *They take counsel together*. And very insolent they were in their deportment: They say, *God has forsaken him; persecute and take him*. Here their premises are utterly false, that because a good man was in great trouble and had continued long in it, and was not so soon delivered as perhaps he expected, therefore God had forsaken him and would have no more to do with him. All are not forsaken of God who think themselves so or whom others think to be so. And, as their premises were false, so their inference was barbarous. If God has forsaken him, then persecute and take him, and doubt not but to make a prey of him. This is *talking to the grief of one whom God has smitten*, ¹⁶²⁵Psalm 69:26. But thus they endeavour to discourage David, as Sennacherib endeavoured to intimidate Hezekiah by suggesting that God was his enemy and fought against him. *Have I now come up without the Lord against this city, to destroy it?* ³³⁰Isaiah 36:10. It is true, if God has forsaken a man, there is none to deliver him; but *therefore* to insult over him ill becomes those who are conscious to themselves that they deserve to be for ever forsaken of God. But *rejoice not against me, O my enemy! though I fall, I shall rise*. He that seems to forsake for a small moment will gather with everlasting kindness.

2. What it was which he justly prayed for, from a spirit of prophecy, not a spirit of passion (v. 13): “*Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul*. If they will not be confounded by repentance, and so saved, let them be confounded with everlasting dishonour, and so ruined.” God will turn into shame the glory of those who turn into shame the glory of God and his people.

PSALM 71:14-24

JOYFUL PRAISES

David is here in a holy transport of joy and praise, arising from his faith and hope in God; we have both together v. 14, where there is a sudden and remarkable change of his voice; his fears are all silenced, his hopes raised, and his prayers turned into thanksgivings. “Let my enemies say what they will, to drive me to despair, *I will hope continually*, hope in all conditions, in the most cloudy and dark day; I will live upon hope and will hope to the end.” Since we hope in one that will never fail us, let not our hope in him fail us, and then we shall praise him yet more and more. “The more they reproach me the more closely will I cleave to thee; *I will praise thee more and better than ever I have done yet.*” The longer we live the more expert we should grow in praising God and the more we should abound in it. *I will add over and above all thy praise*, all the praise I have hitherto offered, for it is all too little. When we have said all we can, to the glory of God's grace, there is still more to be said; it is a subject that can never be exhausted, and therefore we should never grow weary of it. Now observe, in these verses,

I. How his heart is established in faith and hope; and it is a good thing that the heart be so established. Observe,

1. What he hopes in, v. 16.

(1.) In the power of God: “*I will go in the strength of the Lord God*, not sit down in despair, but stir up myself to and exert myself in my work and warfare, will go forth and go on, not in any strength of my own, but in God's strength — disclaiming my own sufficiency and depending on him only as all-sufficient — in the strength of his providence and in the strength of his grace.” We must always go about God's work in his strength, having our eyes up unto him to work in us both to will and to do.

(2.) In the promise of God: “*I will make mention of thy righteousness*, that is, thy faithfulness to every word which thou hast spoken, the equity of thy disposals, and thy kindness to thy people that trust in thee. This I will make mention of as my plea in prayer for thy mercy.” We may very fitly apply it to the righteousness of Christ, which is called the *righteousness of God by faith*, and which is *witnessed by the law and the prophets*; we

must depend upon God's strength for assistance and upon Christ's righteousness for acceptance. *In the Lord have I righteousness and strength,* ²³⁶²Isaiah 45:24.

2. What he hopes for.

(1.) He hopes that God will not leave him in his old age, but will be the same to him to the end that he had been all along, v. 17, 18. Observe here,

[1.] What God had done for him when he was young: *Thou hast taught me from my youth.* The good education and good instructions which his parents gave him when he was young he owns himself obliged to give God thanks for as a great favour. It is a blessed thing to be taught of God from our youth, from our childhood to know the holy scriptures, and it is what we have reason to bless God for.

[2.] What he had done for God when he was middle-aged: He had *declared all God's wondrous works.* Those that have not good when they are young must be doing good when they are grown up, and must continue to communicate what they have received. We must own that all the works of God's goodness to us are wondrous works, admiring he should do so much for us who are so undeserving, and we must make it our business to declare them, to the glory of God and the good of others.

[3.] What he desired of God now that he was old: *Now that I am old and gray-headed,* dying to this world and hastening to another, *O God! forsake me not.* This is what he earnestly desires and confidently hopes for. Those that have been taught of God from their youth, and have made it the business of their lives to honour him, may be sure that he will not leave them when they are old and gray-headed, will not leave them helpless and comfortless, but will make the evil days of old age their best days, and such as they shall have occasion to say they have pleasure in.

[4.] What he designed to do for God in his old age: "I will not only *show thy strength,* by my own experience of it, *to this generation,* but I will leave my observations upon record for the benefit of posterity, and so who *it to every one that is to come.*" As long as we live we should be endeavouring to glorify God and edify one another; and those that have had the largest and longest experience of the goodness of God to them should improve their experiences for the good of their friends. It is a debt which the old disciples of Christ owe to the succeeding generations to

leave behind them a solemn testimony to the power, pleasure, and advantage of religion, and the truth of God's promises.

(2.) He hopes that God would revive him and raise him up out of his present low and disconsolate condition (v. 20): *Thou who hast made me to see and feel great and sore troubles, above most men, shalt quicken me again.* Note,

[1.] The best of God's saints and servants are sometimes exercised with great and sore troubles in this world.

[2.] God's hand is to be eyed in all the troubles of the saints, and that will help to extenuate them and make them seem light. He does not say, "Thou hast burdened me with those troubles," but "shown them to me," as the tender father shows the child the rod to keep him in awe.

[3.] Though God's people be brought ever so low he can revive them and raise them up. Are they dead? he can quicken them again. See ~~1~~2 Corinthians 1:9. Are they buried, as dead men out of mind? he can bring *them up again from the depths of the earth*, can cheer the most drooping spirit and raise the most sinking interest.

[4.] If we have a due regard to the hand of God in our troubles, we may promise ourselves, in due time, a deliverance out of them. Our present troubles, though great and sore, shall be no hindrance to our joyful resurrection from the depths of the earth, witness our great Master, to whom this may have some reference; his Father showed him great and sore troubles, but quickened him and brought him up from the grave.

(3.) He hopes that God would not only deliver him out of his troubles, but would advance his honour and joy more than ever (v. 21): "Thou shalt not only restore me to *my greatness* again, but shalt *increase* it, and give me a better interest, after this shock, than before; thou shalt not only comfort me, but *comfort me on every side*, so that I shall see nothing black or threatening on any side." Note, Sometimes God makes his people's troubles contribute to the increase of their greatness, and their sun shines the brighter for having been under a cloud. If he make them contribute to the increase of their goodness, that will prove in the end the increase of their greatness, their glory; and if he comfort them on every side, according to the time and degree wherein he has afflicted them on every side, they will have no reason to complain. When our Lord Jesus was

quickened again, and brought back from the depths of the earth, his greatness was increased, and he entered on the joy set before him.

(4.) He hopes that all his enemies would be put to confusion, v. 24. He speaks of it with the greatest assurance as a thing done, and triumphs in it accordingly: *They are confounded, they are brought to shame, that seek my hurt.* His honour would be their disgrace and his comfort their vexation.

II. Let us now see how his heart is enlarged in joy and praises, how he rejoices in hope, and sings in hope for we are saved by hope.

1. He will speak of God's righteousness and his salvation, as great things, things which he was well acquainted with, and much affected with, which he desired God might have the glory of and others might have the comfortable knowledge of (v. 15): *My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation;* and again (v. 24), *My tongue shall talk of thy righteousness,* and this *all the day.* God's righteousness, which David seems here to be in a particular manner affected with, includes a great deal: the rectitude of his nature, the equity of his providential disposals, the righteous laws he has given us to be ruled by, the righteous promises he has given us to depend upon, and the everlasting righteousness which his Son has brought in for our justification. God's righteousness and his salvation are here joined together; let no man think to put them asunder, nor expect salvation without righteousness, ^{<3813>}Psalm 50:23. If these two are made the objects of our desire, let them be made the subjects of our discourse all the day, for they are subjects that can never be exhausted.

2. He will speak of them with wonder and admiration, as one astonished at the dimensions of divine love and grace, the height and depth, the length and breadth, of it: *"I know not the numbers thereof,* v. 15. Though I cannot give a particular account of thy favours to me, they are so many, so great (if *I would count them, they are more in number than the sand,* ^{<3405>}Psalm 40:5), yet, knowing them to be numberless, I will be still speaking of them, for in them I shall find new matter," v. 19. The righteousness that is in God is very high; that which is done by him for his people is very great: put both together, and we shall say, *O God! who is like unto thee?* This is praising God, acknowledging his perfections and performances to be,

(1.) Above our conception; they are very high and great, so high that we cannot apprehend them, so great that we cannot comprehend them.

(2.) Without any parallel; no being like him, no works like his: *O God! who is like unto thee?* None in heaven, none on earth, no angel, no king. God is a non-such; we do not rightly praise him if we do not own him to be so.

3. He will speak of them with all the expressions of joy and exultation, v. 22, 23. Observe,

(1.) How he would eye God in praising him.

[1.] As a faithful God: *I will praise thee, even thy truth.* God is made known by his word; if we praise that, and the truth of that, we praise him. By faith we set to our seal that God is true; and so we praise his truth.

[2.] As a God in covenant with him: “*O my God!* whom I have consented to and avouched for mine.” As in our prayers, so in our praises, we must look up to God as our God, and give him the glory of our interest in him and relation to him.

[3.] As the *Holy One of Israel*, Israel's God in a peculiar manner, glorious in his holiness among that people and faithful to his covenant with them. It is God's honour that he is a Holy One; it is his people's honour that he is the Holy One of Israel.

(2.) How he will express his joy and exultation.

[1.] With his hand, in sacred music — *with the psaltery, with the harp;* at these David excelled, and the best of his skill shall be employed in setting forth God's praises to such advantage as might affect others.

[2.] With his lips, in sacred songs: “*Unto thee will I sing, to thy honour, and with a desire to be accepted of thee. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee, knowing they cannot be better employed.*”

[3.] In both with his heart: “*My soul shall rejoice which thou hast redeemed.*” Note, *First*, Holy joy is the very heart and life of thankful praise. *Secondly*, We do not make melody to the Lord, in singing his praises, if we do not do it with our hearts. My lips shall rejoice, but that is nothing; lip-labour, though ever so well laboured, if that be all, is but lost labour in serving God; the soul must be at work, and with all that is within us we must bless his holy name, else all about us is worth little. *Thirdly*, Redeemed souls ought to be joyful thankful souls. The work of redemption ought, above all God's works, to be celebrated by us in our

praises. The Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us to God, must therefore be counted worthy of all blessing and praise.