

PSALM 94

This psalm was penned when the church of God was under hatches, oppressed and persecuted; and it is an appeal to God, as the judge of heaven and earth, and an address to him, to appear for his people against his and their enemies. Two things this psalm speaks: —

I. Conviction and terror to the persecutors (v. 1-11), showing them their danger and folly, and arguing with them.

II. Comfort and peace to the persecuted (v. 12-23), assuring them, both from God's promise and from the psalmist's own experience, that their troubles would end well, and God would, in due time, appear to their joy and the confusion of those who set themselves against them. In singing this psalm we must look abroad upon the pride of oppressors with a holy indignation, and the tears of the oppressed with a holy compassion; but, at the same time, look upwards to the righteous Judge with an entire satisfaction, and look forward, to the end of all these things, with a pleasing hope.

~~1941~~ PSALM 94:1-11

APPEAL TO GOD AGAINST PERSECUTORS

In these verses we have,

I. A solemn appeal to God against the cruel oppressors of his people, v. 1, 2. This speaks terror enough to them, that they have the prayers of God's people against them, who cry day and night to him to avenge them of their adversaries; and shall he not avenge them speedily? ~~288~~ Luke 18:3, 7.

Observe here,

1. The titles they give to God for the encouraging of their faith in this appeal: *O God! to whom vengeance belongeth;* and *thou Judge of the earth.* We may with boldness appeal to him; for,

(1.) He is judge, supreme judge, judge alone, from whom every man's judgment proceeds. He that gives law gives sentence upon every man

according to his works, by the rule of that law. He has prepared his throne for judgment. He has indeed appointed magistrates to be avengers under him (~~610~~ Romans 13:4), but he is the avenger in chief, to whom even magistrates themselves are accountable; his throne is the last refuge (the *dernier ressort*, as the law speaks) of oppressed innocency. He is universal judge, not of this city or country only, but *judge of the earth*, of the whole earth: none are exempt from his jurisdiction; nor can it be alleged against an appeal to him in any court that it is *coram non iudice* — *before a person not judicially qualified*.

(2.) He is just. As he has authority to avenge wrong, so it is his nature, and property, and honour. This also is implied in the title here given to him and repeated with such an emphasis, *O God! to whom vengeance belongs*, who wilt not suffer might always to prevail against right. This is a good reason why we must not avenge ourselves, because God has said, *Vengeance is mine*; and it is daring presumption to usurp his prerogative and step into his throne, ~~612~~ Romans 12:19. Let this alarm those who do wrong, whether with a close hand, so as not to be discovered, or with a high hand, so as not to be controlled, There is a God to whom vengeance belongs, who will certainly call them to an account; and let it encourage those who suffer wrong to bear it with silence, committing themselves to him who judges righteously.

2. What it is they ask of God.

(1.) That he would *glorify himself*, and get honour to his own name. Wicked persecutors thought God had withdrawn and had forsaken the earth. “Lord,” say they, “show thyself; make them know that thou art and that thou art ready to *show thyself strong on the behalf of those whose hearts are upright with thee*.” The enemies thought God was conquered because his people were. “Lord,” say they, “*lift up thyself, be thou exalted in thy own strength*. Lift up thyself, to be seen, to be feared; and suffer not thy name to be trampled upon and run down.”

(2.) That he would mortify the oppressors: *Render a reward to the proud*; that is, “Reckon with them for all their insolence, and the injuries they have done to thy people.” These prayers are prophecies, which speak terror to all the sons of violence. The righteous God will deal with them according to their merits.

II. A humble complaint to God of the pride and cruelty of the oppressors, and an expostulation with him concerning it, v. 3-6. Here observe,

1. The character of the enemies they complain against. They are wicked; they are *workers of iniquity*; they are bad, very bad, themselves, and therefore they hate and persecute those whose goodness shames and condemns them. Those are wicked indeed, and *workers of the worst iniquity*, lost to all honour and virtue, who are cruel to the innocent and hate the righteous.

2. Their haughty barbarous carriage which they complain of.

(1.) They are insolent, and take a pleasure in magnifying themselves. They talk high and talk big; they triumph; they speak loud things; they boast themselves, as if their tongues were their own and their hands too, and they were accountable to none for what they say or do, and as if the day were their own, and they doubted not but to carry the cause against God and religion. Those that speak highly of themselves, that triumph and boast, are apt to speak hardly of others; but there will come a day of reckoning for all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against God, his truths, and ways, and people, ⁴¹⁵Jude 1:15.

(2.) They are impious, and take a pleasure in running down God's people because they are his (v. 5): "*They break in pieces thy people, O Lord! break their assemblies, their estates, their families, their persons, in pieces, and do all they can to afflict thy heritage, to grieve them, to crush them, to run them down, to root them out.*" God's people are his heritage; there are those that, for his sake, hate them, and seek their ruin. This is a very good plea with God, in our intercessions for the church: "Lord, it is thine; thou hast a property in it. It is thy heritage; thou hast a pleasure in it, and out of it the rent of thy glory in this world issues. And wilt thou suffer these wicked men to trample upon it thus?"

(3.) They are inhuman, and take a pleasure in wronging those that are least able to help themselves (v. 6); they not only oppress and impoverish, but *they slay the widow and the stranger*; not only neglect the fatherless, and make a prey of them, but murder them, because they are weak and exposed, and sometimes lie at their mercy. Those whom they should protect from injury they are most injurious to, perhaps because God has taken them into his particular care. Who would think it possible that any of the children of men should be thus barbarous?

3. A modest pleading with God concerning the continuance of the persecution: “Lord, *how long* shall they do thus?” And again, *How long?* When shall this wickedness of the wicked come to an end?

III. A charge of atheism exhibited against the persecutors, and an expostulation with them upon that charge.

1. Their atheistical thoughts are here discovered (v. 7): *Yet they say, The Lord shall not see.* Though the cry of their wickedness is very great and loud, though they rebel against the light of nature and the dictates of their own consciences, yet they have the confidence to say, “*The Lord shall not see; he will not only wink at small faults, but shut his eyes at great ones too.*” Or they think they have managed it so artfully, under colour of justice and religion perhaps, that it will not be adjudged murder. “The God of Jacob, though his people pretend to have such an interest in him, does not regard it either as against justice or as against his own people; he will never call us to an account for it.” Thus they deny God’s government of the world, banter his covenant with his people, and set the judgment to come at defiance.

2. They are here convicted of folly and absurdity. He that says either that Jehovah the living God shall not see or that the God of Jacob shall not regard the injuries done to his people, *Nabal* is his name and folly is with him; and yet here he is fairly reasoned with, for his conviction and conversion, to prevent his confusion (v. 8): “*Understand, you brutish among the people,* and let reason guide you.” Note, The atheistical, though they set up for wits, and philosophers, and politicians, yet are really the *brutish among the people*; if they would but understand, they would believe. God, by the prophet, speaks as if he thought the time long till men would be men, and show themselves so by understanding and considering: “*You fools, when will you be wise,* so wise as to know that God sees and regards all you say and do, and to speak and act accordingly, as those that must give account?” Note, None are so bad but means are to be used for the reclaiming and reforming of them, none so brutish, so foolish, but it should be tried whether they may not yet be made wise; while there is life there is hope. To prove the folly of those that question God’s omniscience and justice the psalmist argues,

(1.) From the works of creation (v. 9), the formation of human bodies, which as it proves that there is a God, proves also that God has infinitely

and transcendentally in himself all those perfections that are in any creature. *He that planted the ear* (and it is planted in the head, as a tree in the ground) *shall he not hear?* No doubt he shall, more and better than we can. *He that formed the eye* (and how curiously it is formed above any part of the body anatomists know and let us know by their dissections) *shall he not see?* Could he give, would he give, that perfection to a creature which he has not in himself? Note,

[1.] The powers of nature are all derived from the God of nature. See ~~Exodus~~ Exodus 4:11.

[2.] By the knowledge of ourselves we may be led a great way towards the knowledge of God — if by the knowledge of our own bodies, and the organs of sense, so as to conclude that if we can see and hear much more can God, then certainly by the knowledge of our own souls and their noble faculties. The gods of the heathen had eyes and saw not, ears and heard not; our God has no eyes nor ears, as we have, and yet we must conclude he both sees and hears, because we have our sight and hearing from him, and are accountable to him for our use of them.

(2.) From the works of providence (v. 10): *He that chastises the heathen* for their polytheism and idolatry, *shall not he* much more *correct* his own people for their atheism and profaneness? He that chastises the children of men for oppressing and wronging one another, shall not he correct those that profess to be his own children, and call themselves so, and yet persecute those that are really so? Shall not we be under his correction, under whose government the whole world is? Does he regard as King of nations, and shall he not much more regard as the God of Jacob? Dr. Hammond gives another very probably sense of this: “*He that instructs the nations* (that is, gives them his law), *shall not he correct*, that is, shall not he judge them according to that law, and call them to an account for their violations of it? In vain was the law given if there will not be a judgment upon it.” And it is true that the same word signifies to chastise and to instruct, because chastisement is intended for instruction and instruction should go along with chastisement.

(3.) From the works of grace: *He that teaches man knowledge, shall he not know?* He not only, as the God of nature, has given the light of reason, but, as the God of grace, has given the light of revelation, has shown man what is true wisdom and understanding; and he that does this, shall he not know? ~~Job~~ Job 28:23, 28. The flowing of the streams is a certain sign of the

fulness of the fountain. If all knowledge is from God, no doubt all knowledge is in God. From this general doctrine of God's omniscience, the psalmist not only confutes the atheists, who said, "*The Lord shall not see* (v. 7), he will not take cognizance of what we do;" but awakens us all to consider that God will take cognizance even of what we think (v. 11): *The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.*

[1.] He knows those thoughts in particular, concerning God's conniving at the wickedness of the wicked, and knows them to be vain, and laughs at the folly of those who by such fond conceits buoy themselves up in sin.

[2.] He knows all the thoughts of the children of men, and knows them to be, for the most part, vain, that the imaginations of the thoughts of men's hearts are evil, only evil, and that continually. Even in good thoughts there is a fickleness and inconstancy which may well be called *vanity*. It concerns us to keep a strict guard upon our thoughts, because God takes particular notice of them. Thoughts are words to God, and vain thoughts are provocations.

PSALM 94:12-23

COMFORT TO SUFFERING SAINTS

The psalmist, having denounced tribulation to those that trouble God's people, here assures those that are troubled of rest. See ³⁰⁶2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7. He speaks comfort to suffering saints from God's promises and his own experience.

I. From God's promises, which are such as not only save them from being miserable, but secure a happiness to them (v. 12): *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest.* Here he looks above the instruments of trouble, and eyes the hand of God, which gives it another name and puts quite another color upon it. The enemies break in pieces God's people (v. 5); they aim at no less; but the truth of the matter is that God by them chastens his people, as the father the son in whom he delights, and the persecutors are only the rod he makes use of. *Howbeit they mean not so, neither doth their heart think so,* ²⁰⁶Isaiah 10:5-7. Now it is here promised,

1. That God's people shall get good by their sufferings. When he chastens them he will teach them, and blessed is the man who is thus taken under a divine discipline, for *none teaches like God*. Note,

(1.) The afflictions of the saints are fatherly chastenings, designed for their instruction, reformation, and improvement.

(2.) When the teachings of the word and Spirit go along with the rebukes of Providence they then both manifest men to be blessed and help to make them so; for then they are marks of adoption and means of sanctification. When we are chastened we must pray to be taught, and look into the law as the best expositor of Providence. It is not the chastening itself that does good, but the teaching that goes along with it and is the exposition of it.

2. That they shall see through their sufferings (v. 13): *That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity*. Note,

(1.) There is a rest remaining for the people of God after the days of their adversity, which, though they may be many and long, shall be numbered and finished in due time, and shall not last always. He that sends the trouble will send the rest, that he may comfort them according to the time that he has afflicted them.

(2.) God *therefore* teaches his people by their troubles, that he may prepare them for deliverance, and so give them rest from their troubles, that, being reformed, they may be relieved, and that the affliction, having done its work, may be removed.

3. That they shall see the ruin of those that are the instruments of their sufferings, which is the matter of a promise, not as gratifying any passion of theirs, but as redounding to the glory of God: *Until the pit is digged* (or rather while the pit is digging) *for the wicked*, God is ordering peace for them at the same time that he is ordaining his arrows against the persecutors.

4. That, though they may be cast down, yet certainly they shall not be cast off, v. 14. Let God's suffering people assure themselves of this, that, whatever their friends do, God will not cast them off, nor throw them out of his covenant or out of his care; he will not forsake them, because they are his inheritance, which he will not quit his title to nor suffer himself to be disseised of. St. Paul comforted himself with this, ~~511~~ Romans 11:1.

5. That, bad as things are, they shall mend, and, though they are now out of course, yet they shall return to their due and ancient channel (v. 15): *Judgment shall return unto righteousness*; the seeming disorders of Providence (for real ones there never were) shall be rectified. God's judgment, that is, his government, looks sometimes as if it were at a distance from righteousness, while the wicked prosper, and the best men meet with the worst usage; but it shall return to righteousness again, either in this world or at the furthest in the judgment of the great day, which will set all to-rights. Then *all the upright in heart shall be after it*; they shall follow it with their praises, and with entire satisfaction; they shall return to a prosperous and flourishing condition, and shine forth out of obscurity; they shall accommodate themselves to the dispensations of divine Providence, and with suitable affections attend all its motions. *They shall walk after the Lord*, ³¹¹⁰Hosea 11:10. Dr. Hammond thinks this was most eminently fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem first, and afterwards of heathen Rome, the crucifiers of Christ and persecutors of Christians, and the rest which the churches had thereby. *Then judgment returned even to righteousness*, to mercy and goodness, and favour to God's people, who then were as much countenanced as before they had been trampled on.

II. From his own experiences and observations.

1. He and his friends had been oppressed by cruel and imperious men, that had power in their hands and abused it by abusing all good people with it. They were themselves *evil-doers* and *workers of iniquity* (v. 16); they abandoned themselves to all manner of impiety and immorality, and then their throne was a *throne of iniquity*, v. 20. Their dignity served to put a reputation upon sin, and their authority was employed to support it, and to bring about their wicked designs. It is a pity that ever a throne, which should be a terror to evil-doers and a protection and praise to those that do well, should be the seat and shelter of iniquity. That is a throne of iniquity which by the policy of its council *frames mischief*, and by its sovereignty enacts it and turns it into a law. Iniquity is daring enough even when human laws are against it, which often prove too weak to give an effectual check to it; but how insolent, how mischievous, is it when it is backed by a law! Iniquity is not the better, but much the worse, for being enacted by law; nor will it excuse those that practise it to say that they did but do as they were bidden. These workers of iniquity, having *framed mischief by a law*, *take care to see the law executed*; for *they gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous*, who dare not *keep the statutes of Omri*

nor *the law of the house of Ahab*; and they *condemn the innocent blood* for violating their decrees. See an instance in Daniel's enemies; they *framed mischief by a law* when they obtained an impious edict against prayer (²⁰¹⁶Daniel 6:7), and, when Daniel would not obey it, they *assembled together against him* (v. 11) and *condemned his innocent blood* to the lions. The best benefactors of mankind have often been thus treated, under colour of law and justice, as the worst of malefactors.

2. The oppression they were under bore very hard upon them, and oppressed their spirits too. Let not suffering saints despair, though, when they are persecuted, they find themselves perplexed and cast down; it was so with the psalmist here: *His soul had almost dwelt in silence* (v. 17); he was at his wits' end, and knew not what to say or do; he was, in his own apprehensions, at his life's end, ready to drop into the grave, that land of silence. St. Paul, in a like case, *received a sentence of death within himself*, ⁴⁰¹⁸2 Corinthians 1:8, 9. He said, "*My foot slippeth* (v. 18); I am going irretrievably; there is no remedy; I must *fall*. *I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul*. My hope fails me; I do not find such firm footing for my faith as I have sometimes found." ⁴⁹⁷⁰Psalms 73:2. He had a multitude of perplexed entangled thoughts within him concerning the case he was in and the construction to be made of it, and concerning the course he should take and what was likely to be the issue of it.

3. In this distress they sought for help, and succour, and some relief.

(1.) They looked about for it and were disappointed (v. 16): "*Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers? Have I any friend who, in love to me, will appear for me? Has justice any friend who, in a pious indignation at unrighteousness, will plead my injured cause?*" He looked, but there was none to save, there was none to uphold. Note, When on the side of the oppressors there is power it is no marvel if the oppressed have no comforter, none that dare own them, or speak a good word for them, ²⁰⁰¹Ecclesiastes 4:1. When St. Paul was brought before Nero's throne of iniquity *no man stood by him*, ⁵⁰¹⁶2 Timothy 4:16.

(2.) They looked up for it, v. 20. They humbly expostulate with God: "*Lord, shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee? Wilt thou countenance and support these tyrants in their wickedness? We know thou wilt not.*" A throne has fellowship with God when it is a throne of justice and answers the end of the erecting of it; for by him kings reign, and when they reign for him their judgments are his, and he owns them as his ministers, and whoever resist them, or rise up against them, shall receive

to themselves damnation; but, when it becomes a *throne of iniquity*, it has no longer fellowship with God. Far be it from the just and holy God that he should be the patron of unrighteousness, even in princes and those that sit in thrones, yea, though they be the *thrones of the house of David*.

4. They found succour and relief in God, and in him only. When other friends failed, in him they had a faithful and powerful friend; and it is recommended to all God's suffering saints to trust in him.

(1.) God helps at a dead lift (v. 17): “When I had almost *dwelt in silence*, then the Lord was *my help*, kept me alive, kept me in heart; and *unless I had* made him *my help*, by putting my trust in him and expecting relief from him, I could never have kept possession of my own soul; but living by faith in him has kept my head above water, has given me breath, and something to say.”

(2.) God's goodness is the great support of sinking spirits (v. 18): “*When I said, My foot slips* into sin, into ruin, into despair, then *thy mercy, O Lord! held me up*, kept me from falling, and defeated the design of those who consulted to *cast me down from my excellency*,” ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 62:4. We are beholden not only to God's power, but to his pity, for spiritual supports: *Thy mercy*, the gifts of thy mercy and my hope in thy mercy, *held me up*. God's right hand sustains his people when they look on their right hand and on their left and there is none to uphold; and we are then prepared for his gracious supports when we are sensible of our own weakness and inability to stand by our own strength, and come to God, to acknowledge it, and to tell him how *our foot slips*.

(3.) Divine consolations are the effectual relief of troubled spirits (v. 19): “*In the multitude of my thoughts within me*, which are noisy like a multitude, crowding and jostling one another like a multitude, and very unruly and ungovernable, in the multitude of my sorrowful, solicitous, timorous thoughts, *thy comforts delight my soul*; and they are never more delightful than when they come in so seasonably to silence my unquiet thoughts and keep my mind easy.” The world's comforts give but little delight to the soul when it is hurried with melancholy thoughts; they are songs to a heavy heart. But God's comforts will reach the soul, and not the fancy only, and will bring with them that peace and that pleasure which the smiles of the world cannot give and which the frowns of the world cannot take away.

5. God is, and will be, as a righteous Judge, the patron and protector of right and the punisher and avenger of wrong; this the psalmist had both the assurance of and the experience of.

(1.) He will give redress to the injured (v. 22): “When none else will, nor can, nor dare, shelter me, *the Lord is my defence*, to preserve me from the evil of my troubles, from sinking under them and being ruined by them; and he is *the rock of my refuge*, in the clefts of which I may take shelter, and on the top of which I may set my feet, to be out of the reach of danger.” God is his people's refuge, to whom they may flee, in whom they are safe and may be secure; he is the rock of their refuge, so strong, so firm, impregnable, immovable, as a rock: natural fastnesses sometimes exceed artificial fortifications.

(2.) He will reckon with the injurious (v. 23): *He shall render to them their own iniquity*; he shall deal with them according to their deserts, and that very mischief which they did and designed against God's people shall be brought upon themselves: it follows, *He shall cut them off in their wickedness*. A man cannot be more miserable than his own wickedness will make him if God visit it upon him: it will cut him in the remembrance of it; it will cut him off in the recompence of it. This the psalm concludes with the triumphant assurance of: *Yea, the Lord our God*, who takes our part and owns us for his, *shall cut them off* from any fellowship with him, and so shall make them completely miserable and their pomp and power shall stand them in no stead.