

**“Abandoned by God?”
(An Exposition of Psalm 28)¹**

Introduction

Psalm 28 is essentially a *prayer* of David. In v.1 he writes, **“To you, O LORD, I call . . .”** But this is *not* your usual calm, collected, even *dignified* kind of prayer. That is the kind of prayer that you and I are probably most accustomed to. But the word for **“call”** there in v.1 could also be rendered to *cry out*. This prayer is something of a *cry of desperation*. We see this in the rest of v.1, where David says,

**“To you, O LORD, I call;
my rock, be not deaf to me,
lest, if you be silent to me,
I become like those who go down to the pit.”**

To David, the idea that his God, his **“rock,”** was somehow turning a *deaf* ear to him in his time of need was more than he could bear; the thought of his God being *silent* to him was a fate worse than death itself. If God would not answer him, David might as well be dead - he would become **“like those who go down to the pit.”**

Have *you* ever *prayed* like that? When was the last time you cried out to God in desperation, as if you could not bear to go on if God did not answer you? Have *you* ever *felt* like that – in *anguish* because it seemed like God wasn’t listening to your prayers? Have you ever wondered if He had forsaken you, despite the fact that His Word promises that He is *always* with you if you are in Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Hebrews 13:5)? In other words, *have you ever felt abandoned by God?*

Do you realize from reading this Psalm that even *King David himself* - the man after God’s own heart and the Lord’s anointed king - felt that way at times? If you have ever felt that way, you are in some pretty distinguished company! So take heart, and take encouragement from this Psalm. For this great Psalm of David points the way back for us; the way back to *assurance* even in the midst of trials; the way back to *praying confidently*, knowing that our God hears us; and the way back to *praising the Lord* and blessing His holy name.

This morning we are going to look at three (3) things from this Psalm of David: **1.)** David's Pleas for Mercy, **2.)** David's Pleas for Justice, and **3.)** David's Praise for God's Mercy.

David's Pleas for God's Mercy (v.1-3)

The *first* thing we see here in this Psalm is *David's pleas for God's mercy*. In v.1-3 he writes,

**“To you, O LORD, I call;
my rock, be not deaf to me,
lest, if you be silent to me,
I become like those who go down to the pit.
Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy,
when I cry to you for help,
when I lift up my hands
toward your most holy sanctuary.**

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

**Do not drag me off with the wicked,
with the workers of evil,
who speak peace with their neighbors
while evil is in their hearts.”**

To the genuine Christian, for whom prayer is his or her *lifeblood*, the very idea of God not listening is simply *unbearable*. To the true believer in Christ, who cannot help but seek God's face in prayer, the silence of God is *torturous*. But to the man whose praying is merely *formal*, who goes through the motions with very little expectation of (and even less watchfulness for) God's answer, David's prayer here in v.1-3 is an entirely foreign concept. The believer *wrestles with God in prayer* the way Jacob wrestled with the Lord at Peniel in Genesis chapter 32, when he clung to Him with all of his might and said, **“I will not let you go unless you bless me”** (v.26).

Do you sometimes wrestle with God in prayer? Then take heart, for only the redeemed truly pray that way. It is no sign of God having cast you aside, but rather proof that He has not. The man of formal, dead religion never wrestles with God in prayer, but gives up at the first sign of difficulty.

And look at the subject of David's prayer – *the mercy and help of God*. In v.2 he asked God to hear the voice of his pleas for mercy in his cries for help. The LORD was his **“rock”** (v.1), and it was to his rock that he went for mercy and help in time of need. If King David himself needed to do that, how much more should we do the same?

And on what basis did David go to God in prayer for help? Did he plead with God on the basis of his own righteousness as somehow being worthy or deserving of God's help? Did he plead with the Lord on the basis of his own status and importance as king of Israel? No. In v.2 he says that he lifted up his hands toward the LORD's **“most holy sanctuary.”** This is a reference to *the most holy place*, the innermost place of God's temple, the place where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the mercy seat on the day of atonement (Leviticus 16:14). David pleaded with God for mercy and help only on the basis of God's appointed sacrifice – the Lamb of God. In the same way we too can only approach God in prayer through the Lord Jesus Christ and in His holy name. We plead with God in prayer on the basis of Jesus and His righteousness alone.

David's Pleas for God's Justice (v.4-5)

The *second* thing we see in this Psalm is *David's pleas for God's justice*. In v.3 David just prayed that the LORD would not drag him off along with the **“wicked”** and the **“workers of evil.”** So now in v.4-5 he turns his attention to the wicked, and pleads with God for His justice against them. There he writes,

**“Give to them according to their work
and according to the evil of their deeds;
give to them according to the work of their hands;
render them their due reward.
Because they do not regard the works of the LORD
or the work of his hands,
he will tear them down and build them up no more.”**

This is a *prayer of imprecation* against God's enemies, and against the enemies of His people. Imprecation is basically praying for God's justice and judgment upon His enemies.

Many in the church today are more than a little uncomfortable with the idea of imprecatory prayers. No less than Charles Spurgeon said that the Psalmist's desires here “are not readily made consistent with the spirit of the Christian dispensation, which seeks rather the reformation than the punishment of sinners.”² Even in Reformed circles some say that imprecatory prayers are not for us in the New Testament age. One notable author goes so far as to say that the imprecatory Psalms themselves (such as this one), “are entirely out of place on the lips of Christians today.”³ Is such thinking correct?

Before you answer in the affirmative too quickly, take note that you would be whittling down the Psalms *quite a bit* if that were the case. One commentator notes that “many of the lament Psalms include an imprecatory prayer” and lists no less than 17 such Psalms.⁴ And that is almost certainly an incomplete list. Are we *really* to approach the Psalms that way, trying to decipher what is or is not proper for us to recite, sing, or pray in public or private worship? Or are the imprecatory Psalms there to teach us how to pray in this day and age as well.

What were the Apostles praying for in Acts 4:29, when, after being arrested and threatened by the chief priests and elders for speaking in the name of Jesus, they prayed and said, **“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.”** They prayed for boldness, no question about it; but they also prayed that the Lord would take notice of their threats. The apostles did not threaten in return, or rage against them in return, or seek vengeance against them; they prayed for the Lord's just judgment against His enemies in protecting His people.

And what of the Apostle Paul? In Galatians 1:8-9 Paul *twice* calls for those who preached a false gospel to be **“accursed.”** In 2 Timothy 4:14-15 he writes,

“Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.”

“The Lord will repay him according to his deeds” (v.14). That is the same wording that we find here in Psalm 28:4, isn't it? Three (3) times in v.4 David prays that the LORD would repay the wicked **“according to”** what they have done. He's asking for justice, much like the woman in Jesus's parable in Luke chapter 18 (v.1-8) who went to the unjust judge over and over again asking for **“justice”** against her adversary (v.3). The judge, though he did not fear God nor man (v.4) gave her justice just so she would quit bothering him. And there in v.7-8 Jesus says,

“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Do we pray for justice? *We should.* In fact, in v.1 of that passage we are told that the reason Jesus told that parable was to teach us that we **“ought always to pray and not lose heart.”** So one of the things that we should persevere in prayer about is asking God for justice!

Last but not least, even the martyred saints in heaven pray this way! In Revelation 6:10 we read:

“They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

2 *The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1 (Part 2), p.21

3 Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p.961

4 Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms*, p.953

And how did God answer their prayer? He told them to *rest* and *wait*, but that chapter ends with the wicked calling upon the rocks to fall on them to hide them from **“the wrath of the Lamb”** (v.16)! In commenting on the imprecation in Psalm 28, Matthew Henry writes,

“This is not the language of passion or revenge, nor is it inconsistent with the duty of praying for our enemies.”⁵

Are we to love and pray for our enemies? *Certainly*. But is that only a New Testament ideal? *Hardly*. Let that sink in for a moment, and note the distinction that Matthew Henry makes between praying with a spirit of *revenge* and that of praying for God's *justice*. David is *not* here praying with an attitude of hatred or rage against someone for a personal offense done to him by his enemies. He is *not* praying that God would be his own personal attack dog. If that is what we conceive of when we think of imprecatory prayers, then we would be right to reject the idea of imprecation outright. But that is *not* what David is doing here; that is *not* the biblical idea of imprecation.

In fact, it should be noted that one of the benefits and safeguards of truly biblical imprecatory praying, is that it *precludes* the whole idea of revenge altogether, doesn't it? (Perhaps *that* is what those who seek to exclude the imprecatory prayers in the Psalms from being used by the church today are *really* arguing against?) Instead of seeking revenge, we are to take our concerns to the Lord. Instead of asking God to swat a fly with a sledgehammer, we ask Him for whatever *He* determines to be just and right. It is *God's* just judgment, *His* justice, that we are to pray for, *not* our own.

Notice also that David not only prays for justice, but assures us of the reality of God's just judgment, which is sure to come. In v.5 he writes,

**“Because they do not regard the works of the LORD
or the work of his hands,
he will tear them down and build them up no more.”**

The day of judgment is most certainly coming. For some that day will come sooner than others, but it is truly not far off for *any* of God's enemies or the enemies of His church. Because they **“do not regard the works of the Lord or the work of his hands,”** the day is coming when He will **“tear them down”** and not build them back up again.

If you are not yet right with God, if you are yet his enemy, who works evil, and speaks peace to your neighbor while evil intent is actually in your heart against them (v.3), turn from your sin and turn to Jesus Christ by faith. Flee the wrath that is to come. Trust in Christ and his death in your place, and you will no longer need to fear the wrath of a holy God, because Jesus will have taken that wrath upon Himself in your place!

And if you are a believer in Christ and are suffering evil at the hands of the enemies of God, or from those hypocrites that David speaks of in v.3, take heart, there is no need to seek revenge or to fret. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Pray for mercy and help; and pray for His justice in His time, and in His way. He will surely give it.

Suffering saints who face even martyrdom for the faith don't look at the imprecatory Psalms and scratch their heads; they understand them just fine. They sing them and pray them, as should we.

5 Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. III, .335

David's Praise for God's Mercy (v.6-9)

The *third* and *last* thing we see in this Psalm is *David's praise for God's mercy* in v.6-9. There he writes,

**“Blessed be the LORD!
For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.
The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts, and I am helped;
my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.
The LORD is the strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
Oh, save your people and bless your heritage!
Be their shepherd and carry them forever.”**

David wrestled with his God in prayer, and now he knows that he has not been abandoned by Him. Now he has re-tuned his heart to sing God's praise once again. He has come full circle from wondering if God heard him to knowing that He has been heard. In v.2 he pleaded with God to **“hear the voice of my pleas for mercy”** and here in v.6 he blesses the LORD **“for he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.”**

Now he exults in the Lord as his **“strength”** and his **“shield”** (v.7). Is the Lord your strength and shield? Then in Christ Jesus you are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37) and can trust Him, exult in Him, and give thanks to Him in song (v.7). And David would have us all know this ourselves. This was no private mercy only for David's sake and his benefit alone, was it? No! But in v.8-9 he tells us that the Lord was not only his strength (as if it were only for the king!), but also that **“The LORD is the strength of his people”** (v.8). He is the **“saving refuge of his anointed”** (or *Messiah* – v.8). In this King David is a type of the Son of David, King Jesus, who was to come.

Lastly, David ends this Psalm in v.9 by once again putting the words of prayer in our mouths, saying, **“Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.”** David doesn't just pray for himself, but for all of the people of God. And we should pray likewise.

The Lord is our Shepherd (Psalm 23:1), and we are His inheritance; and He will surely save, bless, and carry His people. - Amen