



Daily Devotions in the Psalms

Psalm 139-143

Monday 26th October - Psalm 139

You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
5 You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully
made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the
earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your
book
before one of them came to be.
17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
18 Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.
19 If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
20 They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
21 Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
22 I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
23 Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
24 See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

This Psalm is one of the most famous in the whole book. It's often loved because of what it says about God's creation of humanity in the womb; it becomes the favourite Psalm of mothers. And fair enough! But don't make the mistake of thinking this Psalm is about us; it is a thoroughly God-centred Psalm.

It's about the never-leaving presence of God in our lives. It's about God's intimate knowledge of all of us and His sovereign hand over the details of our lives. And your response to the Psalm will be shaped by your relationship to God. If you are against God, this Psalm reminds you that there is nowhere you can hide and that God will call you to account. If you know and love Him, this Psalm reminds you that he sees, understands and is with you in everything that could happen in your life. You can trust Him.

The final verses of this Psalm are often ignored, probably because we're not sure what to do with them. How does the Psalmist's prayer for the slaying of the wicked and hatred of those who hate Yahweh fit with the call to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?

Some consider the last two verses to be a call for God to correct the thinking of verse 19-22. Others consider that these verses are a reflection of the desire for God to bring justice to those who have determined to work against God's purposes and laws, which is a holy desire; remember that these people are bloodthirsty! If God sees all and will call all to account, the Psalmist is asking for that accounting now.

Let me encourage you to meditate on this Psalm - all of it - and praise God for his power, sovereignty and goodness. Let verses 23-24 be your prayer. Rest in His plans and purposes for your life.

James

Tuesday 27th October - Psalm 140

Rescue me, Lord, from evildoers;

protect me from the violent,

2 who devise evil plans in their hearts
and stir up war every day.

3 They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's;
the poison of vipers is on their lips.[b]

4 Keep me safe, Lord, from the hands of the
wicked;

protect me from the violent,
who devise ways to trip my feet.

5 The arrogant have hidden a snare for me;
they have spread out the cords of their net
and have set traps for me along my path.

6 I say to the Lord, "You are my God."
Hear, Lord, my cry for mercy.

7 Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer,
you shield my head in the day of battle.

8 Do not grant the wicked their desires, Lord;
do not let their plans succeed.

9 Those who surround me proudly rear their
heads;

may the mischief of their lips engulf them.

10 May burning coals fall on them;
may they be thrown into the fire,
into miry pits, never to rise.

11 May slanderers not be established in the land;
may disaster hunt down the violent.

12 I know that the Lord secures justice for the
poor

and upholds the cause of the needy.

13 Surely the righteous will praise your name,
and the upright will live in your presence.

David prays that God would establish justice in the world. That he would bring down those who exploit and harm others, and that he would lift-up the downtrodden and the poor. This Psalm picks up the book of James, reminding us God has promised that we do not have because we do not ask. A wish is a prayer without a destination, but praying to God is not wishful thinking, it's one of God's appointed means of action in the world.

David is under the external pressure of violent men and the internal pressure of anxiety. It's interesting Paul in Romans 3 draws from this Psalm in his description of the wickedness of sin, that is also in all of us. That which is wicked is best defined as "proud" (v5). There is a shift in their evil, it starts at the depth of their being and then moves through their hearts, mouths, actions to attacking David. It is difficult dealing with people who seem to be in their element when they are in opposition to you.

His prayer in verses 6-11 is a call for help. In verses 6-8, he prays on the basis of his relationship with God – "you are my God", "the strength of my salvation." In verses 9-11, he prays on the basis of God's justice, that God's will would win out. David is equally concerned about the slander they are doing - words are not incidental.

David's confidence increases through the Psalm and reminds us that when we are under pressure, and when evil strikes, to lay it out before God in prayer.

Heavenly Father forgive us for sinning against others by not praying for them. We ask in your mercy that you would use our prayers and lives to do good in the world. Amen

Martin

Wednesday 28th October - Psalm 141

1 I call to you, Lord, come quickly to me;
hear me when I call to you.
2 May my prayer be set before you like incense;
may the lifting up of my hands be like the
evening sacrifice.
3 Set a guard over my mouth, Lord;
keep watch over the door of my lips.
4 Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil
so that I take part in wicked deeds
along with those who are evildoers;
do not let me eat their delicacies.
5 Let a righteous man strike me—that is a
kindness;
let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head.
My head will not refuse it,
for my prayer will still be against the deeds of
evildoers.

6 Their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs,
and the wicked will learn that my words were
well spoken.
7 They will say, "As one plows and breaks up the
earth,
so our bones have been scattered at the
mouth of the grave."
8 But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign Lord;
in you I take refuge—do not give me over to
death.
9 Keep me safe from the traps set by evildoers,
from the snares they have laid for me.
10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
while I pass by in safety.

It was after the people of Judah came back from exile in Babylon, that the five books that make up the psalms were brought together. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe many of the challenges being part of the returning people. Take some time to imagine what it must have been like for one of those who returned to sing these words. What parts of this psalm echo with their own history?

How might the difference between the righteous and the wicked keep the faithful person faithful and call the wicked to repent?

1 Peter 1:17 describes us as exiles, that we are far from home. How might these words encourage us to keep following the Lord Jesus faithfully in these times exile?

Phil

Thursday 29th October - Psalm 142

I cry aloud to the Lord;
I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy.
2 I pour out before him my complaint;
before him I tell my trouble.
3 When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who watch over my way.
In the path where I walk
people have hidden a snare for me.
4 Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;
no one is concerned for me.
I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.
5 I cry to you, Lord;
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."
6 Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.
7 Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather about me
because of your goodness to me.

It's hard to know exactly when (or what) in David's life this Psalm refers to. He spent plenty of time on the run in caves, hiding from Saul and others. But it does give us a model for calling out to God in desperate times.

Notice that the Psalmist cries out to God with his concerns and troubles. The Psalmist doesn't hold back from telling God what God already knows either. This reminds us that God cares about us and listens to us like a patient and loving Father. He wants to listen to us.

The Psalm also reminds us that God listens to us even when no one else will. God cares for us and for our lives even when no one else does (v. 4). This means that we can come to him when we feel alone and abandoned and betrayed. He is our refuge (v. 5), our safe place where we can hide and seek protection.

I want you to also notice how the Psalmist entreats God with his needs. He begs God to listen, rescue and set free (v. 6-7). That God would listen implies that He will act! We can call out to God with specific needs.

Whatever it is that is going on in your life that leaves you feeling alone and in desperate need, know that God sees and hears and understands. Know that you can call out to Him when no one else seems willing to listen. Know that He gives you permission (and words!) to use as you pray and seek Him out. And if you're worried that He's not concerned with you, look to the cross. There we see Jesus abandoned and forsaken so that we might never be. There we see our sympathetic High Priest, who suffered in our place.

Father, help me to trust you and your good purposes in my life. Help me to pour out my heart to you, especially when I feel alone and desperate and abandoned. Please make our church a place where no one feels along. Thank you that Jesus was abandoned for me and that you care and listen and act. Amen

James

Friday 30th October - Psalm 143

Lord, hear my prayer,
listen to my cry for mercy;
in your faithfulness and righteousness
come to my relief.

2 Do not bring your servant into judgment,
for no one living is righteous before you.

3 The enemy pursues me,
he crushes me to the ground;
he makes me dwell in the darkness
like those long dead.

4 So my spirit grows faint within me;
my heart within me is dismayed.

5 I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works
and consider what your hands have done.

6 I spread out my hands to you;
I thirst for you like a parched land.

7 Answer me quickly, Lord;
my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me
or I will be like those who go down to the pit.

8 Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing
love,
for I have put my trust in you.
Show me the way I should go,
for to you I entrust my life.

9 Rescue me from my enemies, Lord,
for I hide myself in you.

10 Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God;
may your good Spirit
lead me on level ground.

11 For your name's sake, Lord, preserve my life;
in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.

12 In your unfailing love, silence my enemies;
destroy all my foes,
for I am your servant.

In the gospel of John, we read about Judas and Peter. Both sinned against our Lord. Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied Jesus. Both felt the weight of their sin, but their responses were totally different. Judas ran away from Jesus and took his life. Peter ran to Jesus, the giver of life.

In this Psalm, David persistently cries out to the LORD. Two things David brings to the LORD. First, the threat of an enemy (perhaps Saul) who desires to crush him. Second, the threat of God's judgment on him for his own unrighteousness. It may even be that the first problem is an outworking of the second. Regardless, David's response is good, right and worthy of our imitation.

In a fallen world our lives are marked by hurt, sometimes by others, sometimes as a result of our own sin. At times, it is a crazy mix of the two! Either way, our response should be the same as David's, to cry out to the God of unfailing love, to the God of mercy, to the one who is our righteousness, for our salvation and for His name's sake. Amen.

Danny