Grace and mercy and peace to you through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Happily, the restrictions on gathering sizes have been eased. Because of this, I will begin having worship services again starting Sunday, May 10. This will be for those who are comfortable coming out. I will continue sending out a copy of my sermons until things get back to normal (or as close as they get).

Our God is great and He is above all that is going on. Keep looking to Him through His Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

*To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

When we keep looking to Christ, in spite of everything going on, we give Him glory and put to shame the forces of evil that work against Him.

In Christ’s love

John

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5-10-20

Psalm 142

The title of this Psalm is “*Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer*.” The title of a Psalm is actually part of the Psalm in the Hebrew text; it is not an addition placed there by someone commenting on the Psalm. The meaning of the word ‘maskil’ is unknown. The nice thing about this for us is that it shows the antiquity of the Scripture. The Psalms are truly old; to the point that the meanings of some words are lost, even to the Jews.

The title tells us that this was a prayer of David when he was hiding in a cave. There are two accounts of David lodging in a cave: Adullam and Engedi. In both these cases, David was hiding from Saul. Adullam is in 1 Samuel 22. David had escaped from King Saul and went to a place called Nob where many priests lived with their families. The head priest, Ahimelech, gave David food for himself and his men. When Saul found out, he had 85 priests killed and then attacked the town, killing all the people and animals. David stayed in the cave of Adullam at this time and many people, about 400 men, came to him as his followers. His own family joined him there.

In 1 Samuel 24, David and his men had fled to a cave in Engedi. It happened that Saul came into the cave where David was hiding to relieve himself. David’s men encouraged him to kill Saul while he had the chance but David refused, saying that he would not raise his hand against his king or Yahweh’s anointed. He did, however, sneak up and cut the edge off Saul’s robe. After Saul left, David came out and showed Saul that he could have killed him but did not. He was trying to prove that he was not an enemy to Saul. Saul did leave him alone for a while but eventually pursued him again.

Thinking on these things gives us the overall sense of the Psalm. We think of David, hiding a cave; caves tend to be dark, wet, and musty. The things that live in caves are usually not pleasant. Picture David, sitting in this cave, while a king with his army of thousands of soldiers hunts for him; it is a depressing scene. It is under these conditions that David prayed this Psalm. He cried out to God; told Him about everything that was going on. David’s spirit was overwhelmed; he had many enemies after him. Even though he had some who had joined him, he still felt alone, with no-one to defend him. He knew that he could not defeat the forces of Saul. But still, he did the right thing, David turned to Yahweh, the almighty God of the universe.

We can learn a lot from this Psalm about how to pray when we are in deep distress; when we feel that we are beyond our means and are barely hanging on. Sometimes we feel like we are in a cave, with no-one to help us. We feel like we are imprisoned by our circumstances. The Christian is not exempt from serious troubles in this life. In John 16:33, Jesus tells us, “*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world*.” These are encouraging words telling us that we can depend on Jesus, because He has dealt with all those things that separate us from God; all those things that threaten to do us permanent harm. But He is faithful to tell us that we will suffer.

Let’s begin with these first two verses in David’s Psalm:

*I cry aloud with my voice to the Lord;  
I make supplication with my voice to the Lord.  
I pour out my complaint before Him;  
I declare my trouble before Him.*

Twice we read that David uses his voice; his prayer is aloud. Sometimes, when we can hear our own voice, it helps us to know that we are actually talking to Someone. As we can hear ourselves when we have a conversation with another person, it seems more real to us that we are talking to God and He is listening. Certainly, God can and does hear silent prayer; but especially when our heart is aching and we feel as if there is nothing left, praying out loud is a powerful gift that God has given us.

These two verses echo each other. David starts by ‘crying aloud’ and ‘pouring out’. Sometimes, when things are really rough in our lives, this is how we must start our prayer. We just let it go; we tell the Lord all that is going on; our thoughts and troubles just pour out of us. Even if we may feel like we are just babbling, this is a beautiful way to get started. Remember that God loves you and He wants to hear from you, He wants to hear from the depths of your heart. It is a joy to Him when His child comes to Him; open and honest.

We often hold back; we try to sanitize our prayers. We use the proper words and try to dance around certain subjects. God already knows what is going on, you might as well be honest. A good example is confessing sin. We try to be delicate and not really say what we did wrong. Confess what you did wrong; you can’t put a polish on sin. The same goes for your true feelings. Tell God what is going on; tell Him how you truly feel. This is being honest with the Lord and this is how He wants you to be. Now certainly, we must be reverent before our creator; we can express our feelings or sins without being crass.

When we let ourselves pour out our deep feelings and things that are happening to us aloud, it helps us to get a handle on things and put things in a better perspective and order. This is what David means by ‘I make supplication’ and ‘I declare’. These prayers are still heartfelt, still deep, but we’ve been able to organize things a little better. We’ve gone past the blubbering stage and can talk a little more sensibly to God. Tell God exactly what the problem is as you see it and ask for His grace to see it in proper light. Tell Him what is troubling you; or, if you don’t really know, ask Him to tell you.

The important thing is to turn to God in prayer, even if you don’t feel like He is there or listening. He will listen to your complaint; not simply complaining or especially not complaining about Him, but just what is going on that you desperately need help with. So often, we hold things inside, keep them bottled up to the point where they actually damage us. Sometimes, we simply talk to others who can’t do anything about what is happening, or worse, don’t really care. Talking with Christian brothers and sisters is part of God’s design. They ought to share your joys and troubles; mostly, they ought to pray for you. But our first action must be to go to God Himself.

These first two verses are part of the prayer, but they are sort of describing how it is that David goes about praying. Next, He begins to explain what is going on, but at the same time, confessing His belief that God is in control.

*When my spirit was overwhelmed within me,  
You knew my path.  
In the way where I walk  
They have hidden a trap for me.*

David talks about his spirit being overwhelmed. Our spirit is our highest part; it is above our soul, the seat of our emotions; it is above our physical bodies, although these too will be made eternal; our spirit is the part that is given new life when we accept Jesus as our Saviour.

David’s spirit had become overwhelmed; there was too much for him, he didn’t know what to do. We can be in that position also, even as Christians. So much can happen to us that we don’t know what to think. We become paralyzed in our actions because we don’t know what to do. Life can be like that. We live in a fallen world where sin takes a very real toll on us. It isn’t even necessarily our own sin; it is just the power of sin itself. We can begin to see why God hates sin and why He wants us to hate it also.

But David knows that God is already aware of what is coming in his life and we can have that same assurance. God has already seen our future, He knows the pitfalls that are coming, He has heard our prayer. God has also already preserved us. David had enemies and they laid traps for him; they tried to discredit him and tried to kill him. We also have enemies that do these same things. The Old Testament focused on the physical; on things of the earth. These things foreshadowed our current times. The physical in the Old Testament gives us an idea of the spiritual now.

We have deadly enemies: satan, the world, and our own flesh. These three are constantly laying traps for us; they are tempting us toward evil. If it were not for the intervention of God, no-one would survive. Other people often cause us problems and we tend to focus on them as being the enemy; but Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:12, “*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*.” The fact that we are engaged in a spiritual struggle is why prayer is so important; it is a spiritual weapon.

In verse 4, David expresses more of how he feels:

*Look to the right and see;  
For there is no one who regards me;  
There is no escape for me;  
No one cares for my soul.*

This is a deep feeling of despair. In a court of law, a person’s defender or advocate stood to their right. David can see no-one defending him. He is trapped by Saul’s armies and sees no escape. It seems that everything is against him and nobody cares for him. Whether true or not, he is dejected and this is how things seem to him. But again, he turns to Yahweh. When everything piles up against us, when it seems there is no way out of our problems, when it seems that there is no end in sight to difficulties; turn to the Lord. He promises peace and strength; not necessarily an end to your problems, but peace and strength. The end of problems is for the next life.

Starting with verse 5, we see how David turns to God and puts all his faith in Him for deliverance. These verses are a beautiful example of how we should turn to God.

*I cried out to You, O Lord;  
I said, “You are my refuge,  
My portion in the land of the living.*

Notice that we don’t simply look to God for refuge, He is the refuge. He is the rock, the strong tower, the mighty fortress. We must depend on Him and nothing else. Jesus is the only true refuge we have available to us; without Him, we are lost for eternity; with Him, we have eternal life.

God, through Jesus Christ, is our portion even here during this life. There are many things the world entices us to run after: money, fame, power, possessions. All of these things will be lost to us when we die; they are temporal. But Jesus is eternal. When we gain Christ; when He becomes our most beloved possession; we have a portion that remains with us even after we die.

*Give heed to my cry,  
For I am brought very low;  
Deliver me from my persecutors,  
For they are too strong for me.*

Our persecutors, the devil, the world, and our flesh, are too strong for us. They will defeat us if we try to deal with them ourselves. Actually, anyone who is not a Christian is enslaved by them; and even those who are Christian must be careful or we can be enslaved by them again. The source of our strength must be Christ. Only through Him can we defeat our enemies.

*Bring my soul out of prison,  
So that I may give thanks to Your name;  
The righteous will surround me,  
For You will deal bountifully with me.*

We are imprisoned by evil until we accept Christ as Saviour. It is so important that we show our gratitude to God. Jesus sacrificed an unimaginable amount for our salvation. He left the glory and joy of heaven to become a man, lived a life of sorrows, was crucified by those He loved, and experienced separation from His Father; all for us. He deserves thanks; He deserves our worship; He deserves our lives.

One day, all this evil will be gone. We must trust in God and wait for His timing. He is able to use the present evil times to fulfill His perfect plan. When our time here on earth is over, we will be surrounded by righteous people; by those who want to be with Christ. Our future life will be sharing in the inheritance of Jesus. All that we deal with in this life will be worth it.

In this Psalm, we learn about David’s despair. We learn that we can apply these things to our own lives when all seems dark and hopeless. But let’s also consider Jesus, who became a man in order to experience all the things that we do, except sin.

In the first verses, we can picture the desperation in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus’ spirit was overwhelmed. He said to His disciples “*My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me*.” In the garden, He cried out to His Father from the depths of His heart.

Traps had been set for Him: traps to have Him arrested, traps to have Him discredited, traps to have Him executed. No-one stayed to defend Him. His disciples all ran; Peter denied even knowing Him three times. Those who persecuted Him were too strong for Him because He had laid aside His God-hood to become one of us and because it was the will of God that He would go through these things for our redemption.

Remember Him hanging on the cross and crying out to His Father “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me*?” Even though God had turned from Jesus so that He could take our punishment, Jesus still cried out to Him; He called upon His Lord.

His body spent three days in the prison of the grave, in the prison of death, in a cave. But in all of this, He remained faithful to God, and ultimately, God delivered Him. Jesus is now in glory at the right hand of God. The only ones around Him are the righteous who have died in Him along with the angels who have been faithful to God.

Jesus is our model; He is the one we imitate. When we stay true to God through Jesus, we will receive these same rewards. Prayer is our necessary lifeline to God. Prayer will give us the strength to persevere until Christ comes back and all His promises are fulfilled.

Philippians 4:6-7

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Prayer

Thank You Lord God, for the gift of prayer. It is the way that You have ordained, in Your wisdom, for us to come into Your presence and speak with You. It is the way for us to unburden our hearts because we know that You listen to us with love and that You are the one who can deal with whatever problems we might have: You are almighty God.

Jesus, we come before You in prayer. There are so many in this congregation who are suffering with great difficulties. All of us are faced with the unknown dangers of sickness and disease. Our lives have been disrupted and there is no clear way before us into the future. We come to You now in faith and trust. We place our lives in Your hands; asking for Your deliverance and to guide us in life that we may be useful servants to You.

We offer You grateful praise for the sacrifice You made on our behalf. You redeemed us from sin and satan and hell. Thank You for Your righteousness that You have bestowed upon us. We look forward to that day when we will all be in Your Kingdom, surrounded by righteousness.

Lord Jesus, it is in Your most holy name we pray

Amen