

## Cry Out to the LORD!

Psalm 28

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I want to begin the sermon this morning by reading Job 23:2-5, 8-9. Job's life had been hit hard with tragedy, and he took his pain to the Lord in prayer, and this happened:

*"Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning.<sup>3</sup> Oh, that I knew where I might find him [God], that I might come even to his seat!<sup>4</sup> I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments.<sup>5</sup> I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me . . .<sup>8</sup> "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him;<sup>9</sup> on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him."*

Have you ever had Job's experience where it seemed the LORD was nowhere to be found? Have you ever prayed and it felt like your prayer didn't make it past the ceiling because it just seemed like God wasn't listening to your prayer? There was no rebellion on your part, no lack of faith, but there was only silence from the LORD. Perhaps you began to panic because you believed God had turned away from you. Perhaps despair rose in your heart and overwhelmed you.

Most of us have experienced what Job did. If you haven't, I hope you never do. Yet most of us, at some point in our lives, will feel that God is not listening to our prayers. Listen, when this day comes into your life, it is comforting to know that even King David experienced a time when it seemed God was not listening to his prayers, and he told us about it in Psalm 28.

The crisis that gave rise to David's fear that God wasn't listening to his prayer is in vv. 3-5. He gives us a very graphic image of his fear. Look at v. 3,

*Do not drag me off with the wicked, with workers of evil.*

We've heard David express similar concerns in previous Psalms. David is one of those men who was keenly aware of his sin, and therefore, it seemed there were times when the guilt of his sin got the best of him. There were times when he feared that he would be numbered among the wicked and judged as an unbeliever.

So, before we dig into Psalm 28, there are a couple of observations I want to make about it. Psalm 28 is part-three of a trio of Psalms (26, 27, and 28) that poetically express seasons of David's life when his fears got the best of him. We don't know the specific circumstances that prompted him to write these Psalms, but they are so very helpful and practical for Christians.

Psalm 28 is a lament that takes us on a journey from a desperate cry to God by asking God if He is listening, to a crisis of faith, and then back to deep trust in God. It teaches us how to cry out to the LORD in faith when God seems silent because the guilt of our sin strikes fear in our hearts.

It points us very clearly to Christ. He is the One who cried out, who was answered, and now who intercedes for us as our Great High Priest. So, I have four application points to guide us through Psalm 28 to help us learn how cry out to the LORD when all seems lost.

### I. Always Cry out to the LORD for Help (vv. 1-2)

Last Sunday, we covered Psalm 27. Most people are familiar with Psalm 27 because it calls us to have *one great desire*: To seek the LORD. Yet, Psalm 27 ends with these words in v. 14:

*Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

Isn't it interesting that Psalm 27 concludes by calling us to *wait for the LORD*? Then Psalm 28 opens with David's concern that God is silent.

Waiting for the LORD is something we must learn to do better, since God doesn't usually answer our prayers on our timetable. We do not expect to have to wait for the LORD. We tend to think that God will answer our prayers like our friends answer our text messages – in a timely manner. Yet, God's timetable and ours are not the same. So, what should we do while we are waiting? The answer is that we need to keep praying. We need to learn how to persevere in prayer. This really is one of the main points of Psalm 28.

Look at vv. 1-2 in your Service Guide or Bible:

*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.<sup>2</sup> 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.*

David is bringing an urgent prayer before the LORD because the situation is desperate. The multiple uses of Hebrew words related to "sounds" tip us off to the urgency in these two verses: "call," "deaf," "silent," "hear the voice of my pleas for mercy," and "cry" emphasize the urgency of his prayer. These words also express the intensity of the crisis in David's heart.

David knew that if God was silent, he would be like those "who go down to the pit." The Hebrew word for "pit" is a metaphor for death and the place of the dead. In other words, if the LORD didn't answer his prayer, David believed his life would be no different from that of unbelievers who lived and died without divine deliverance. He believed he would be in a place where the voice of the LORD is not heard, and there was no hope of calling on the LORD.

However, look in v. 2. Look at the phrase, "Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy." The word "pleas" is plural. God may have seemed silent, and David may have been afraid, but it didn't keep him from continually praying. David prayed and kept on praying to the LORD even when the LORD seemed silent.

In Luke 18, Jesus called us to pray the same way when He told the parable of the persistent widow to show that we should always pray and never give up. Jesus said that night and day, this widow bothered the judge, asking him for justice, until he finally gave in, heard her case, and did what she asked. David showed the same kind of persistence in v. 2.

So, friends, praying desperate, urgent prayers in faith is not pretending everything is fine. Faith persistently cries for mercy because it believes God hears even when the LORD is silent.

God is not offended by honest fear in our prayers. We saw this last Sunday in Psalm 27. Listen, God invites desperate prayers. His silence does not mean He has rejected us. It may mean He has other plans.

You and I may not know why God is silent or delays answering our prayers, but we need to be confident of this – He is working for our good while we wait. In Isaiah 30:18, Isaiah writes:

*Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.*

Friends, we can be sure of this. The silence that David feared, Jesus endured on the cross. On the cross, Jesus cried out:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

I want you to hear the good news of the gospel here, and this is what you need to preach to yourself when God seems silent: *Jesus endured the silence of God on the cross so that you and I would never be abandoned or separated from Him.*

So, if you're in a season of silence with the LORD, you need to remember that Jesus entered the silence of God on the cross to secure your hearing before the Father. The LORD hears your prayers, for Jesus is your High Priest who intercedes for you before the Father.

What we are called to do now is pray continually. We are called to pray in faith and wait for the LORD. May the LORD give us grace to continually cry out to the LORD until He answers our pleas for mercy.

## II. Continue to Cry Out for Justice in a Wicked World (vv. 3-5)

Before I read vv. 3-5, I want to draw your attention to the contrast in these verses. David contrasts the *works of evil people* with the *works of the LORD*. Listen closely to what he wrote:

*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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.*

Did you hear the contrast between the works of the wicked and the works of God? There is a tension created between the works of the wicked and the works of God.

In these verses, David lays out the heart of his concern and fear, and it zeroes in on the idea of *works*. He asks God to judge accurately and with discernment. He asks God to judge the wicked by their works. The works that the wicked were doing were *disregarding the works of the LORD*. In other words, it was the evil of unbelief that led to the evil acts they were committing.

We don't know what David was going through when he penned this prayer. It is logical to wonder why he thought he might be dragged off with the wicked. Psalm 28 doesn't give us any context to know his specific struggle. However, what we do know from David's life is that he was very aware of his sin, and at times his conscience condemned him.

David wasn't being self-righteous in these verses by asking God to judge between the works of the righteous and the wicked. As I said, David knew he was a sinner, but he also knew he trusted in the LORD for forgiveness. However, the wicked in these verses didn't do that. They disregarded the works of the LORD, meaning they had no faith in God.

They had no fear of God, and so they ignored God and His works, which led them to practice all kinds of wickedness. Specifically, they spoke peaceful words to their neighbors while, in their hearts, they had planned to do them evil. Their problem was not that they were ignorant of God and His ways but that they simply didn't care. They had no fear of God or faith in God, and so they disregarded the works of the LORD.

However, I want you to notice the face of evil here. It is not a face of anger marked by yelling and screaming, but one of peace and even kindness. It is speaking with religious language and super spiritual words that seem like peace, but in the end, it is death. It is complete and total hypocrisy by the workers of evil.

Jesus preached about these kinds of people in the Sermon on the Mount when He said many will come to me on the Day of Judgment and say to me (Matthew 7:22-23):

*'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

Friends, the LORD sees beyond appearances. The religious language of unbelievers will not fool the LORD. Religious language doesn't equal godliness. So, let's heed the warning in this passage before we stand condemned before the Judge of the Universe ourselves. Let's make sure we are not practicing the hypocrisy defined in this text.

So, here are some questions to consider: They will make plain the tension these verses create. Question: *How does the LORD judge and repay if we are judged based on our works? Who can stand before the LORD based on their works? Who can survive that?* Answer: No one!

That is, unless you have faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus was treated as the wicked, although He had never committed any sin. The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:21,

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Now, by our faith in Christ, the justice that we deserve falls on Christ so that mercy could be given to us. *So, where do you stand with God today? Have you come to Him and repented of your sins and placed your faith in Christ and His work on your behalf?*

Only the work of Jesus in the gospel will save you, and you are credited with that work when you repent of your sin and place your faith in Him. Faith and repentance are sovereign gifts of God. This means you can only do that work after you have been given the ability to repent and believe. So, have you repented of your sin and placed your faith in Christ today?

Friends, if you have never repented and believed in Christ, you need to understand that the time to do this is not guaranteed. Time is not on your side. One of Satan's most effective strategies is delay. When you know the LORD is calling you, you need to answer that call. The heart doesn't grow softer each time you resist the Holy Spirit. Most often, it grows harder and more resistant to the LORD's call.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is the same for us. Delayed obedience to repent of our sin is disobedience, and the longer we are resistant and disobedient, the harder the heart can become. Beware the temptation to delay your repentance.

### III. Remember to Sing a Song of Thanks to the LORD (vv. 6-7)

In vv. 6-7, David's mood shifts dramatically. He goes from his deepest concern to that of profound thankfulness. He knows his prayers have been heard and even answered. Listen to how he gives thanks to the LORD:

*Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.<sup>7</sup> 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.*

There is no explanation of what happened. We don't have any rescue recorded in the Psalm, yet, gratitude abounds, and David's confidence and faith are enlarged. Think about it this way: It may even be possible that David's situation didn't change, but his heart changed. His heart was enlarged toward the LORD, and his faith and confidence in God grew stronger.

Here's what I want you to notice. David didn't list his troubles here. He didn't name names or blast the wicked. Instead, David moved from thinking about his horizontal afflictions to his vertical relationship with God. He begins to define the character of God that has sustained him.

Notice what he said,

*"Blessed be the LORD! . . . who heard my pleas for mercy."*

Then in v. 7, David doesn't say,

*"The LORD is strength, a shield, and help."*

No, David says in v. 7,

*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.*

Notice the pronouns "my" and "I" that he uses to show how personal the LORD worked in his life. These truths about God are deeply personal to him. We saw this in Psalm 27 when David said,

*"The LORD is my light . . . my salvation . . . the LORD is the stronghold of my life."*

David is saying that he was connected to his glorious God by His great mercy and grace, and therefore He is all of these things for him.

Friends, when Jesus works so profoundly and powerfully in your life to save you, then gratitude and thanksgiving are the natural overflow of that work. Then these deep theological and doctrinal facts become the heartbeat of your life. They are no longer theological or academic facts but precious truths that fill the heart with gratitude and love for Jesus.

Think of Jesus' encounter with the ten lepers that He healed in Luke 17. They came to Him and asked for mercy and to heal them. He told them to go and show themselves to the priest, and as they were going, they were healed. Then, only one stopped when he realized he was healed and went back to Jesus to thank Him for the mercy and saving grace He had given him. Then Jesus replied in vv. 17-19:

*"Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."*

You see, to have leprosy in the first century was a death sentence. Jesus saved these men's lives. He showed them mercy and gave them new life, but only one was grateful for the salvation given.

Friends, salvation is a free gift to us, paid for and earned by the sinless life of Christ, His substitutionary death on the cross in our place, and His resurrection from the dead. We couldn't earn our salvation, nor do we deserve it. We were beyond healing and hope until the mercy of Christ came and saved us. We were spiritual lepers who were beyond help and healing. Now, because of what Christ has done, we simply live lives of gratitude because of the salvation given to us.

Can you say with David these deep personal truths because of how Christ has worked in your life to heal you and save you?

*The LORD is my strength . . . my shield . . . my light . . . and my salvation.*

Are these mere words to you, or do they have deep theological significance because they have been driven deep into your heart by the grace and mercy of God, who allowed you to struggle so that you would learn hard but profound lessons in faith? Then the heart overflows with profound gratitude.

Listen, it is always great to give thanks for the provisions of life that God gives to us: jobs, money, health, families, cars, etc. We should always give thanks for these things, but the one great thing we should always be thankful for and come back to is our salvation. Don't take this for granted.

You see, the leper that returned to Jesus understood that he had no hope and was as good as dead. Then, when Jesus healed him and saved him, he was overcome with gratitude. You and I need to understand that we had no hope and were beyond saving until Jesus saved us. Do you understand that was the condition you were in, or have you forgotten how desperate your situation was?

Someone once asked 19th-century British evangelist Gypsie Smith why he kept sharing Christ with people. He replied, *"Because I never lost the wonder of it all."* Translation: He never got over being so thankful for his salvation that he couldn't stop talking about how Christ saved him. He lived a life of profound gratitude for his salvation.

How about you? Are you grateful for your salvation in Christ, or is it "ho-hum" and really no big deal? If you are not profoundly grateful for your salvation, then you have a heart problem. You either don't understand the height, depth, breadth, and length Christ went to in order to save you, or you think you deserve it.

Friends, it may be that the LORD is silent in your life right now because you need to learn the lesson of profound gratitude of Christ's salvation in your life. He may be taking you through a season of silence and struggle to reawaken or awaken for the first time a heart of gratitude in you so that you sing a song of thanksgiving as King David did.

#### IV. Continually Intercede on Behalf of God's People (vv. 8-9)

*The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. <sup>9</sup>*

*Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.*

In vv. 8-9, David's prayer expands from *me to us*. He moves from "rescue me" to "rescue us." He intercedes on behalf of the entire nation. David's intercession here is a display of the heart of a shepherd. He

didn't forget his sheep. Like Christ, the Great Shepherd, he lifts them, carries them, protects them, and intercedes for them before the Father.

Friends, what David prayed for—Jesus fulfills completely. The strength of God is seen in Jesus as our Good Shepherd who gave His life to take us before the LORD. He laid down His life for us and took it up again with resurrection power. Now, because He is our strength and refuge, He carries His people before the Father as our Great Shepherd and High Priest.

Christ's intercession for us means that He transforms us into men and women who cry out for mercy for others. We long for His resurrected life to be given to them. We plead that new life be given to the wicked so that they turn from their sin and be saved.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, interceding on behalf of others is one of the marks of mature faith. Those who have been cared for by the Savior begin to care for others. So, as we apply these verses, a good question to ask is: *Are you interceding for others in the strength of the LORD? Are you striving to care for others, shepherding them, and taking them before the Father in prayer?*

Our final application of Psalm 28 is found in the Lord's Supper. I want to draw your attention back to vv. 1-2 and God's covenant that He made with His people.

Verses 1-2 together and essentially hold the whole Psalm together, but vv. 1-2 are particularly important. Listen to how they bookend these two verses: "*To you, O LORD*" (our covenant LORD) and "*your most holy sanctuary*" (this is the place where the covenant is made). These are covenant promises that bookend vv. 1-2.

*Friends, Christ is the LORD!* He is the One who makes His covenant with His people when He saves them. As a result of our salvation, Christ has become for us *the most holy sanctuary* (v. 2). Jesus is the LORD who makes the covenant and the sanctuary where God makes a covenant with those in Christ by His blood.

In the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of Christ's body and blood, which make this covenant effective for us. In the Lord's Supper, we remember the covenant made by the shedding of His blood, and we renew this covenant with our LORD each time we take the bread and the juice. When we take the Lord's Supper, we enter the Sanctuary of Christ to remember and renew that covenant with Him.

Because of what Christ has done for us we know that He hears our prayers and that we will not be dragged off with the wicked. As we take the Lord's Supper, we are called to repentance and remember the forgiveness given. We bless His name for He is our strength and our shield, so that our hearts are renewed, and we trust in Him. Finally, as we take the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the Lord's death until He returns and call those who have yet to believe in Him to trust in Christ.