

---

# The Pilgrim's Heavenly Strength

## Psalm 28<sup>18</sup>

*Russ Kennedy*

These are the songs of the pilgrim. But they are not just the songs of a pilgrim, wandering alone. They are the songs of a great company of pilgrims. Down through the ages, they have been called out by God from the place and people of their birth. Over the long years, they have been told more and more about who they are and what their God intends. Through sayings and songs, they come to know the great Pilgrim who would come one day and be God living in a human tent.

Pilgrims are travelers, not wanderers. They know they are on a journey. They affirm that this place is not their home. They will live here well. But they live with their hearts in the homeland and their eyes on Mt. Zion. They long for the King. They sometimes cannot see clearly because of the dirt of the world. They sometimes see through blurry tears. They sometimes stumble because the path is long, the way is weary and the body is weak. They travel in company with other pilgrims. And as they travel, they sing songs of the King. They sing of the King's people. And they sing most about home and the day the King comes.

The pilgrim's songs sometimes soar in worship. Sometimes they groan in pain. The pilgrims sometimes are perplexed. The pilgrim's songs are often sung to the King; but often they simply sing to each other with each other for each other. These songs tell the story of the heart, the landscape of the soul's wretchedness and wonders. These songs often are filled with wisdom. And they often soar with worship. But they are always sung in the walk. They are the songs of journey. They are sung by the sojourners.

So we will join the pilgrims and learn their songs. We will hear them and heed them and sing them. We also are pilgrims.

Pilgrims need God's mercy. This Psalm highlights that in the movement of the song.

<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.

---

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise designated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>6</sup> 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

(v. 2) God, hear the voice of my pleas for mercy...

(v. 6) God, you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy...

## **We Need You, O God**

**(v. 1-2)**

*Pilgrims express their dependence on God.*

<sup>1</sup> 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.

### **We call to You**

**(v. 1)**

We need God so we want Him to hear us. If God were an idol, we would not expect to be heard. If He were stone or wood or the figment of our imagination, we may think we depend on Him, but we wouldn't expect Him to respond to Him. Christians pray to a Heavenly Person. If He does not hear us then we are no different than the wicked. We are just like the pagan and the Muslim whose false god never hears.

### **We cry out to You**

**(v. 2)**

We need God so we want Him to help us. Praying and praising is not just a psychological exercise that helps us feel better about ourselves. We cry out to God because we expect that He will help us. He will move for us.

We expect this because we know the true God, the Lord of the Universe, is truly merciful. Because we are His children our requests are offered in hope, not fear. While David in this Psalm pleads for God's mercy, we now know we have God's mercy. Christ has come. The mercy of God is poured out on us because the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus. So live in the flowing river of mercy and grace.

How wonderful it is to say how much we need God. We say in our praises. We say it on our prayers. We say and sing and share it to God. We say and sing and share it with one another. This was the way of the one true Pilgrim when He walked earth's weary way. It is our way too. Say with me, "We need You, O God." Say to one another, "We need God."

**You Deal with the Wicked, O God****(v. 3-5)***Pilgrims are different from the wicked around them.*

<sup>3</sup> 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.

**Do not judge us along with the wicked****(v. 3)**

We want to be treated differently than the wicked because of God's mercy. Now maybe this is one of those obvious things. But sometimes we need to remind ourselves and even say or sing this to God. In this fallen world pilgrims suffer alongside the wicked who reaping what they have sown. If God judges America Christians will suffer. But when we stand at the final judgment, we will be safe. The wicked will go into eternal punishment while the righteous will enter the joy and pleasure of the Lord.

We must act differently than the wicked because of God's judgment. The wicked are dangerous and deceitful. They plot and plan evil behind smiling faces and soothing words. Christians are people who are honest, sincere, genuine. They also are not hiding hatred and making evil plans against others. Though we may not actually do harm, we must not imagine, plan or fantasy about doing harm to someone else. God deals with that.

**Judge the wicked as they deserve****(v. 4)**

Now this sounds a bit strange in our ears. But it is a kind of praying that is in line with God's purposes. This does not mean that we are praying that God not save them. God does save those He has chosen. And we pray that God will save and gather all of them. But God is also judging the wicked exactly as they deserve. While the world appears full of injustice, our prayers like this remind us that God will deal with the wicked.

**The wicked disregard God's work****(v. 5)**

There are so many ways in which the wicked take no notice of the works of God. They do not see God at work in creation, in the events of history, in the words of Scripture,

in the lives of His people. In a nice play on words, since they disregard what God has built, God will tear down what they have built.

It is important to want God's just ice against the wicked. But it is even more important to want to be different from the wicked. Not that they set the standard - whatever our culture is doing Christians do the opposite. Rather, we live holy, righteous lives and the effect is that we are different.

## **We Bless You, O God**

**(v. 6-7)**

*Pilgrims praise and worship the Lord who has helped them.*

<sup>6</sup> 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.

This is worship. This is just reveling in God. He has heard us. He has helped us. We respond to Him in several ways.

### **We bless the Lord**

In worship, when we say, "Blessed be the Lord", we are lifting Him up. We are hallowing Him in our thoughts. While blessed sometimes means, "Happy" not here. We are wanting the Lord to be seen as worthy of being worshipped.

### **We trust in the Lord**

In worship, we remind each other to trust in the Lord. We say and sing about Who He is, what He is like and how He has moved to help us. In the way His people will trust Him all the more.

### **We exult in the Lord**

In worship we exult in the Lord. We revel in Him. We delight in Him. We turn away from all the difficulties and distractions that pull at us. We put in their place all lesser things. We put in the highest place the Lord God. We shiver with joy that He is ours and we are His.

### **We give thanks to the Lord**

In worship, all glorying in God must be filled with gratitude to God. This is the great antidote to all our complaining. Give thanks. In all things, give thanks. Real gratitude is not trying to give something back to God. The gratitude that rises up from grace is humbling to us and honoring to God.

Pilgrims praise the God who is all to them. It is a great thing to know that we need God. But what an even greater thing to know that He fills that need to overflowing.

**We Commend You, O God****(v. 8-9)***Pilgrims magnify God in their talk to others and to God.*

<sup>8</sup> 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.

God's people not only praise God but they promote Him. They advertise Him. They speak glowingly of Him among themselves and to the world.

**God is our Strength**

We believe that God is our Strength. This is not an empty assertion or theoretical truth. God enables every act of faith and every good deed. God's grace strengthens the inner man so that even when the outer is decaying, the inner is being renewed. The body may be failing and falling down, the Lord is the strength of our lives. He makes us strong.

**God is our Salvation**

We believe that God is our salvation. We believe that God saves us. Those are almost the same. God Himself is our salvation. He gives us Himself in His Son. And God has moved in real history to accomplish that salvation. He is our Salvation

**God is our Shepherd**

We believe that God is our shepherd. With all that means all through the Bible. He provides, protects and pursues His people. He is all we need in this life and in the life to come. He guards us and He guides us. He is our Shepherd.

**Reflect and Respond**

Why do Christians need mercy?

God's people are pilgrims:

Pilgrims express their dependence on God.

Pilgrims are different from the wicked around them.

Pilgrims praise and worship the Lord who has helped them.

Pilgrims magnify God in their talk to others and to God.

God's people are pilgrims who live in the hope and surety of God's help. Do you?