

A Battle Prayer

Psalm 141:1-10
Halifax: January 11, 2009

Introduction:

As most of you know,

- In our morning worship service,
 - I have been preaching through the book of Ephesians.

This wonderful letter opens with a description of how the Lord has lavished us with His grace through Jesus Christ,

- giving us the forgiveness of sins and life from the dead so that we, who were once dead in trespasses and sins, may now live in God's house forever and ever.
 - The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us.
 - Paul goes on and on describing the glory that is given to us!
- And then in chapter 4, we are called to live out this new life—to walk worthy of the calling we have been given in Jesus Christ.
 - We are to put off the old man that is corrupt in His ways,
 - and by God's grace, to put on the new man that is renewed in the image of God.
 - More and more, we are to become like Jesus Christ...
 - in the way we live together as God's sons and daughters,
 - and in the way we conduct ourselves in this world.
- But when we get to Ephesians 6:10,
 - Paul reminds us that Satan and all who are in league with him are not pleased with our new life in Christ.
 - Satan, the fallen angels, and the world that is under his sway are mustering their strength and skill to lead us away from serving Christ.
 - It is an all out battle.
 - Accordingly, we are exhorted to put on the whole arm of God that we may able to stand in the day of evil...
 - When temptation is brought to bear against us in all its power.
- We have just now completed an examination of each piece of armour...
 - And now we have come to Ephesians 6:18 where Paul begins to speak about the need for prayer in the battle.
 - In verse 18, he calls to persevere in prayer with watchfulness...
 - And in verse 19, he calls to pray for the ministry of the word.

- These are out battle prayers.
- But before we go into this,
 - I want to take a week to present to you a Psalm of Focus for us to sing in connection with this section on prayer.
 - The psalm I have selected for this purpose is Psalm 141.
 - It is a psalm of David in which he earnestly prays against temptation and against the snares of the wicked.
- This morning I want to show two things from this Psalm...
 - First, I want to show you how you are to plead with the Lord that He would hear you.
 - Then, secondly,
 - I want you to show you how to pray against three particular temptations or snares that are brought against us God's people...
- First then,
- I. Learn to plead with the Lord, to plead that He will hear you.**
 - **that He would receive your prayer and regard it...**

A. Look at the earnestness with which this Psalm opens!

1. Verse 1 says,
 - Psalm 141:1: LORD, I cry out to You; Make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.
 - a. You see that there is a great urgency in this prayer—
 - It is twice said, “I cry out to you.”
 - When you are desperate, you do not just speak, but you cry out to God.
 - And there is this urging of Him to make haste...
 - There is the realisation that delay may be fatal... help is needed at once in the heat of the battle!
 - It is the prayer of one who is convinced that he needs God's help and that without it, he will be ruined.
 - b. I do not say that you must always pray this earnestly...
 - But this is a prayer in the day of evil—in the day of testing and temptation.
 - And at such a time, this earnestness is called for lest you be swept away into sin.

2. It is clear from the contents of this prayer that it is prayed in the heat of temptation—
- That is what makes it so urgent.
 - a. Likely, it was the prayer of David when Saul was in pursuit of him in En Gedi.
 - Saul was pursuing David for no reason but envy—
 - He had seen the Lord's hand upon David and the favour that David was gaining with the people.
 - Now the worst thing you can do when you see God's favour on a man is to try to resist it...
 - In doing so, you will find that you are fighting against God.
 - But that is what Saul was doing—
 - He was driving himself mad in the process...
 - His malice was so great that he had violently slain the priests at Nob for assisting David,
 - even though David had done no wrong...
 - and even though the priests had no idea that Saul was pursuing him.

TRANS> We are given a full account of the matter in 1 Samuel 20-24.

- b. In 1 Samuel 24, we were told how David was given an opportunity to kill Saul.
 - David was hiding in a cave, and while he was there, Saul came into the cave to relieve himself.
 - He did not know that David was there, and to prove that he was there and could have killed him, David cut off the hem of Saul's robe...
 - And then when Saul went out, David called out to him with words of sweetness and respect,
 - asking Saul why he was pursuing him when he had done no wrong to him.
- c. David was able to respond in this gracious way to Saul because he fought against temptation to do otherwise...
 - And the way he fought against it was by earnest prayer to God in the heat of the temptation!
 - That is why the opening words of this Psalm are so urgent.
 - David knew that without God's help,
 - he would be drawn into Saul's wickedness.

3. Brothers and sisters, this is how you are to pray in times of temptation!
- a. I have explained to you as we have studied about the battle spoken of in Ephesians 6 that there is real danger.
- There are many who do not stand in the day of Satan's assault.
 - There are those who are not genuine believers and so are led away by temptations...
 - But there are also those who are believers who fall for a time and bring much harm to themselves and others.
- b. You are to pray as if everything depended upon the Lord hearing you!
- Because everything **does** depend upon His hearing you!
 - Don't you see—if he does not keep you, you will be destroyed by sin...
 - You will depart from God and never return...
 - You are absolutely dependent on His grace to keep you.
 - The difference between a true believer and false believer is that the true believer knows this.
 - He knows that without God's grace, he would be overcome.
 - Too often we pray prayers that are merely perfunctory.
 - We forget that in prayer we are bringing petitions to the only one who can truly help us!
 - and that if we do not receive His help, we will not stand!
 - Away with all foppish prayers at such times!
- c. You must not suppose that it is an affront to God to pray in this way...
- Some might say,
 - But God is not stubborn or deaf... why should I plead like this?
 - Doesn't this make it appear that He is reluctant to hear us?
 - No, that is not the right way to think about prayer...
 - You honour to Him when you are urgent in such matters...
 - because you show that His help is your only hope.
 - You are like the widow with the unjust judge—there was no one else to help her.
 - You are like Jacob when he finally came to realise that he could not bless himself by his own wit,
 - but must have the blessing of the Lord...

- It was then that he honoured him by persevering prayer, refusing to let the Lord go unless he blessed him.
 - Moses prayed in the same manner when he interceded for Israel after they worshipped the calf...
 - And even our Lord Jesus prayed this way in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was tempted—
 - and he urged His disciples to pray likewise...
 - In Hebrews 5:7 we are told that
 - “in the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear...”
 - This is prayer that honours the Lord!
 - By this you show your faith in Him as your only help.
 - Like Jacob, you come to the place where you have nothing left but to plead His mercy.
- B. And notice further that you are here taught to pray for God’s acceptance of your prayer on the basis of Jesus Christ.
1. That is the essence of what is brought forward in verse 2 when it says:
 - Ps 141:2: Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.
 - This refers to the incense and sacrifice that was offered each morning and each evening in Israel’s appointed worship.
 - All through the scripture, incense is symbolic of the intercession of Jesus Christ which is a sweet savour to God...
 - And the sacrifice is symbolic of the Jesus sacrifice of Himself on the cross that reconciles us to God.
 - In Israel,
 - The people had set times of prayer each day corresponding with the evening and morning sacrifice.
 - Each day, wherever they were, they would turn toward Jerusalem and remember the incense and the sacrifice that was being presented to God as they prayed.
 - Even in the time of the exile when the temple lay in ruins,
 - we are told how Daniel turned to Jerusalem to pray at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice...

- three times a day as the Jews said, for the evening sacrifice was done at dusk and was counted as two times—
 - In this way, Daniel showed that he knew his prayers to be acceptable only through the intercession and sacrifice that God had appointed...
 - And that he did it even he knew that no incense or sacrifice was being offered showed that he looked beyond what was symbolic to the promise of God in Jesus Christ.
2. It is looking to the intercession and offering of Jesus Christ that makes your prayers acceptable to God...
- a. You cannot expect to be heard unless you present your prayer in the conscious recognition of Christ the mediator.
 - If you suppose that you can come before God without His intercession and without reliance on His sacrifice,
 - God will not receive your prayers because you are coming to Him falsely—not as God is, but as an idol who needs no atonement.
 - Our confidence is that we come in Jesus’ name who was crucified for us and who ever lives to make intercession for us.
 - b. Therefore, you can come to God with boldness, expecting that your prayers will be set before Him...
 - That is the language used in verse 2—
 - that our prayer would be set before Him rather than rejected...
 - That through Christ, it will be presented before Him as an acceptable prayer.

TRANS> What a marvellous thing that through Jesus Christ we have access to God.

- Without such access, we would quickly be drawn away to destruction by temptation.
 - How important it is that we pray.
 - The Lord gives grace to all His elect so that they are those who call upon the name of the Lord and are saved.
 - He says, “Look unto me, all the ends of the earth and be saved.”
 - And by His grace, we look to Him and are saved instead of being destroyed by sin.
- Now I want to look at three temptations to which we are exposed as they are presented in this Psalm.
 - I want you to look at them and at how you are to pray against them.

II. Learn from this Psalm how to pray against these temptations that you will face in the evil day.

A. First of all, you are taught to pray that God would set a guard for your mouth.

- In verse 3, it says:
 - Ps 141:3: Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

1. Oh my brothers and sisters, what awful things come forth from our mouths!

- a. Here we are, offering up our prayers to God,
 - yet, out of the same mouth that is praying...
 - how many things have been said that ought never to have been said!
 - How is it that from the same mouth prayers and cursing can come forth?
- b. This is surely an area in which you see your need for God's help—that He would put a guard on your lips...
 - How many harsh words have you spoken to your wife and children...
 - How many disrespectful words have you spoken to you parents or your husband.
 - How many cutting words have you spoken to your brothers and sisters.
 - How many selfish words.
 - How many complaining words...
 - How many words of exaggeration...
 - How many words of gossip and criticism...
 - How many angry words...
 - How many immoral words...
 - How many idle words...
 - Just listen to yourself around the house!
- c. It is no wonder that when Isaiah, that holy prophet of the Lord, saw the glory of Lord he confessed that he was a man of unclean lips who dwelt in the midst of a people of unclean lips...
 - Do not think this to be a little sin because it is such a common sin...
 - The fact that it is just a way of life for us makes it all the more loathsome...
 - Remember that corrupt words come from corrupt hearts.

TRANS> But my brothers and sisters,

- Is this something you ever even think about praying for—

- that God would set a guard over your mouth?
 - Too often we suppose that the sins of our tongue are nothing much to be concerned about...
 - But see the example of this Psalm and learn!
2. If the context of this Psalm is indeed those days when Saul was pursuing David—hunting him (as David once said) as if he were a partridge in the wilderness...
- Then we see how powerfully God answered David's prayer...
 - How he must have been tempted to curse Saul during these awful days,
 - for David had done no wrong.
 - But as a picture of Jesus Christ, David, by God's grace, restrained his lips from malice and blessed Saul.
 - Hear the gracious words he spoke when he was encouraged by his men to kill Saul in the cave...
 - 1 Sam 24:6: And he said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD."
 - And then with what gracious words did he address Saul himself.
 - 1 Sam 24:9-12: And David said to Saul: "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm'? Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed.' Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you.
 - These are the sweet words that the three thousand men who went with Saul in pursuit of David heard when David released Saul on the Rocks of the Wild Goats at En Gedi as the place is called in 1 Sam 24:2.
 - I believe this language is picked up in verse 6 of our Psalm... which could literally be translated,
 - "Their judges are released (released without harm) on the rocks (on the rocks of the Wild Goats), and they hear my words, for they are sweet."
 - The word translated "overthrown" means "to release" and so could refer to David's release of Saul when the Lord had delivered him into his hand in the cave.

- And the words translated “by the sides of the cliff” are literally “on the rocks,”
 - the same that are used to describe where David was in 1 Sam 24:2.
- Perhaps you may think that this is too refined an interpretation.
 - I will accept it...
 - but whatever the case, we see here a prayer of David for God to keep his tongue from evil...
 - and in 1 Samuel 24 we see how God gave David marvellous grace that he did not sin with his tongue.
- Such words as we find there in David are the words of the man who has honestly sought the Lord to keep His lips from guile!
 - Could it be that the harsh words that come from your lips for far lesser provocations come forth because you have not sought the Lord to restrain your tongue?
 - David was tempted to this sin just as you are, but he prayed earnestly and God answered him.
 - How differently it would have gone for David if he had not restrained his men when they wanted to kill Saul!
 - How wonderfully he saw the hand of God delivering the kingdom into his hands when he restrained himself!
 - How much more important that our Lord Jesus,
 - when He had the authority to curse His enemies...
 - kept back his lips from reviling them and bore the affliction that the Father had appointed for Him!
 - The salvation of the world depended on it!
 - How glad we should be that He prayed that He enter not into temptation when His disciples slept!
 - Let us learn to follow His example and pray that we will not be tempted to sin with our tongue,
 - even when we are provoked by grave injustice of those who ought to love us.
 - By those who hate us because God’s favour is upon us.

TRANS> To the first temptation to pray against is the temptation to sin with your tongue in the heat of the battle.

- B. Secondly, you are to pray that you will not be enticed to join the wicked in their wickedness...
1. What a great difference there was in David's circumstances and those of Saul when David was fleeing from him.
 - a. Saul was in the palace, feasting on royal dainties and enjoying the comforts of luxury...
 - David was running around in the woods, sometimes without adequate food and shelter.
 - Surely, this was a source of temptation to him.
 - b. And here is the prayer that arises out of this temptation:
 - In verse 4 he petitions the Lord...
 - Psalm 141:4: Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works With men who work iniquity; And do not let me eat of their delicacies.
 2. Oh brothers and sisters, when you are deprived of the comforts of this world because of your service to Christ,
 - it can be very easy to look at sinful men with envy who have their portion in this world!
 - You can see certain of them enjoying their sin and their comforts and you can say, "Why should I go on serving the Lord?"
 - The seductress can look very appealing to you...
 - The gold and silver that reward covetousness can glitter before you...
 - How easily you can be drawn away and enticed.
 - And for David, the great temptation was to take the easy way out and just get rid of Saul.
 - It was the easiest thing in the world for him to be drawn into behaviour toward Saul that was just like Saul's behaviour toward him.
 - But you see how David prays against this temptation.
 - He prays that his heart will not be inclined to any evil thing.
 - 3. And not only that, but in his prayer he even goes on to affirm that it is better to be chastened by the righteous than pampered with the wicked!
 - a. In verse 5 he affirms that it is better to be struck and rebuked by the righteous than to enjoy the pleasures of the wicked...
 - Look at what he says:
 - Psalm 141:5: Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it.

- Listen— I know that there are times when you get tired of being corrected.
 - Some of you children grow weary of the restraint put on you by your parents...
 - Your heart is enticed to run with the wicked!
 - But you need to see that the restraint is good for you.
 - You need to give thanks for it because it keeps you in the way of the Lord.
 - It is His correction that He graciously gives you to keep you from destruction...

- b. Even though many righteous persons had been drawn in by Saul to suppose that David was wicked and were now afflicting him,
 - Even though they were afflicting him when he had done no wrong...
 - David considers himself advantaged because he knows that the Lord does not afflict him without purpose.
 - It is all part of God’s plan.

 - Therefore, David says that he counts it as *kindness* when they strike him...
 - The word *kindness* is *hesed*—a mercy—an expression of covenant love.
 - Instead of becoming bitter toward those who struck him, David prays for them in their calamity...
 - That is an alternative way to translate the last phrase in verse 5...
 - The NKJV says:
 - “For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked.”
 - But the word “against” can be translated “in” and the word “wicked” can be translated “calamity” making the verse read, as in the KJV,
 - “for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamity.”
 - In other words, he prays for them when trouble comes upon them instead of rejoicing in it.

 - David knew that he needed this testing from God in order that the Lord might perform his work in him.
 - That is why he considered it a kindness.

- He would rather be afflicted by the Lord than to feast with the wicked.
- c. What a great perspective this is!
- Rather than becoming bitter and resentful, when you are tried,
 - count it all joy!
 - The enemy wants you to curse God and die when you are afflicted and deprived of your comforts...
 - He wants you to turn away from God...
 - but God is working life in you through your afflictions.
 - Look at Christ!
 - The chastisement He bore brought salvation to the whole world!
 - Should we shrink back when the Lord calls us to bear affliction for him in this life?
 - Even to be misunderstood by the righteous and struck by them?
 - My brothers and sisters,
 - do not grow weary under the Lord's correction!
 - He chastens those He loves!
 - Let affliction have its perfect result in you that you may come forth as gold!
 - Pray earnestly to Him that your heart will not be inclined to wickedness in such times,
 - in the day of testing in the wilderness.

TRANS> So now we have seen two deadly temptations against which you must pray...

- The temptation to sin with your tongue...
- The temptation to refuse to bear the cross...
- And now thirdly,

C. Learn to pray against the temptation to despair when Christ's kingdom does not seem to prosper.

1. Surely this is one of our greatest temptations...

- a. We pray the prayer, "Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"
 - But how often do things seem to move in the other direction!

- Instead of righteousness increasing,
 - we see more and more wickedness.
 - Instead of the church becoming more holy,
 - we see it growing more and more corrupt.
 - Instead of many coming to Christ,
 - we see many turning away from Him.
- b. Surely, David knew this temptation when he was pursued by Saul.
- 1) He had been anointed by Samuel to be king...
 - What encouragement it must have been to him when he was brought into Saul's courts and became friends with Jonathan...
 - And when he was given such grace to go forth with the Lord's armies so that the women sang,
 - Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands!
 - It was evident that God was moving things along according to His promise.
 - 2) But what had become of God's promise now?
 - Now Saul was seeking David's life!
 - Now Saul had violently murdered the priests at Nob for helping David and David felt the weight of that.
 - Why was God's kingdom not advancing?
2. Just look at the graphic language David uses in verse 7 to describe the condition of God's kingdom at this time...
- a. He says,
 - Psalm 141:7: Our bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave, As when one plows and breaks up the earth.
 - This is a picture of carnage!
 - It is as if the bones of God's people are ripped apart and scattered all over the place...
 - There is not well-ordered kingdom...
 - There is only carnage.
 - b. Such has often been the condition of the church—God's covenant people—in history.

- There is so much division and so much sin...
 - There is so much weakness...
 - We are not even a threat to world at such times.
 - What a tiny impact we have for Jesus Christ today.
- c. It can be very tempted to despair.
- to lose confidence that Christ's kingdom will go forth and will prosper and that His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
3. But you see what this Psalm teaches you to do after you have acknowledged the deplorable state of the church...
- after you have said:
 - "Our bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave..."
- a. You are to remember that God is the one who raises up bones and puts them back together so that they live.
- He loves to come forth in the most desperate times to bless His people!
 - To bring forth Noah from the ark...
 - To bring forth Abram from Babel,
 - To bring forth Israel from Egypt,
 - To bring forth the kingdom of David from the period of the judges,
 - To bring forth Israel from the Babylonian exile,
 - To bring forth Jesus from the cross and the grave.
- b. And so after expressing the deplorable, hopeless looking condition of the church in verse 7,
- we have the words of assurance and faith in verse 8...
 - Ps 141:8: But my eyes are upon You, O GOD the Lord; In You I take refuge; Do not leave my soul destitute.
 - Though we may be in this desperate deplorable condition, we do not look at the circumstances, but at the LORD.
 - Turn your eyes unto Him!
 - Beseech Him not to leave you destitute!
 - He will bring good out of all this for His people!
 - He will show Himself strong in our behalf!

- c. Of course it is at such times of lowliness and destitution that our enemies grow confident.
 - 1) They become certain that it will be easy to destroy us now.
 - They are sure that in our deplorable condition they can snare us...
 - They can lead us away from God.
 - With much hubris, they turn up their attack!
 - We find ourselves in the midst of the evil day!
 - 2) But see how you are taught to pray that they will fail in their efforts to ensnare you!
 - Look at verse 9-10
 - Ps 141:9-10: Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, And from the traps of the workers of iniquity. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, While I escape safely.
 - What a beautiful picture this is...
 - All these snares around and the servant of the Lord passes through them unharmed!
 - Yes, often suffering greatly, but unharmed as to God's purpose of grace!
 - This is the prayer of David that God answered...
 - Saul laid a million snares for him, but David passed through them all and Saul was the one who fell into the net at last.

Conclusion

- Be assured that even so it will be for you if you are in Christ Jesus.
 - You see, this is much more than David's prayer...
 - This is Christ's prayer for His whole church...
 - He intercedes for us and in His intercession, He prays that we will not be caught in the devil's snare...
 - He prays that instead, the wicked will fall into their own nets while we escape safely...
 - We do not pray this prayer alone!
 - We pray this prayer with Jesus the head of the church!
 - With Jesus whom they tried to ensnare and whom they tried to destroy, but who was raised up to live forever!

- With Jesus whose body we are... so that when we are brought to the brink of ruin,
 - we can know with confidence that we shall not perish because He will not perish!
 - We shall not perish, but we shall prosper and be given our full inheritance.

- Yes my brothers and sisters,
 - This is not just David's prayer in the battle,
 - It is the prayer of Jesus Christ...

 - And those who are in Christ pray this prayer with Him...
 - I don't mean that all who are in Christ necessarily pray these exact words (though its not a bad idea),
 - but I mean that we, in Christ, ask for this deliverance from the snares of the evil one and are assuredly answered.

 - Those who are outside of Christ do not pray this prayer...
 - They cannot pray it because they are already caught in the devil's snare.
 - They cannot pray that they will not fall away from the Lord when they have not yet even come to the Lord...
 - But once you have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and set free from bondage to Satan,
 - Then it will be your earnest prayer in the day of temptation that you are not ensnared again and taken captive to his will...
 - And because you are in Christ,
 - Satan will not be able to draw you away.
 - The Lord will answer your prayers.