

PSALM 17

AN APPEAL TO HEAVEN

When David wrote this Psalm, he was in great distress and danger from the malice of his enemies; but here, by prayer, he addresses himself to God – his tried and tested refuge – and seeks shelter in Him. He appeals to the Lord concerning his integrity (verses 1-4), and he prays to still be upheld in his integrity and preserved from the malice of his enemies (verses 5-8, 13). He also gives a description of the evil character of his enemies, and uses that as a plea with God for his preservation from their wicked hands (verses 9-12, 14); and he comforts himself with the hopes of his future happiness on the glorious Day of Resurrection (verse 15). In this Psalm, we see David as a picture of Jesus, Who was perfectly innocent, and yet was hated and persecuted – but Who also, like David, committed Himself and His cause to His Father Who judges righteously. How blessed it is to discover Jesus in this sweet prayer! Brother or sister, you and I may – in His righteousness – look up to that same God Who is and can be both just and the Justifier of every poor sinner who believes in Jesus. To His throne, we may come – and indeed, we are commanded to come! – so that the sentence of our justification in Jesus may come forth! God has found no iniquity in our glorious Surety; and therefore, the sweetest, strongest, and best of all prayers are those which the poor believer sends up when he tells God that the life of Jesus was perfect, and that His nature was entirely free from even the taint or shadow of sin. Precious Lamb of God! What unanswerable arguments may the souls of Your redeemed ones find in Your holiness, as our Surety! And what can a sinner tell Jehovah that is more pleasing to Him, than when he agrees with the gracious voice and proclamation from heaven, in which the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!” May He help us to also be well-pleased in Jesus’ justifying righteousness, wherein we stand accepted before the throne!

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

This is “a prayer of David.” David would not have been a man after God’s own heart if he had not been a man of prayer. He was a master in the sacred art of supplication. He flies to prayer in all times of need, as a pilot speeds to the harbor in the stress of tempest. The smell of the affliction-furnace is upon the present Psalm, but there is evidence in the last verse that he who wrote it came unharmed out of the flame. In this present plaintive song, we have “an appeal to heaven from the persecutions of earth.” The spiritual eye may see Jesus here.

There are no very clear lines of demarcation between the parts, but we prefer the divisions adopted by that precious old commentator, David Dickson. In verses 1-4, David craves justice in the controversy between him and his oppressors. In verses 5 and 6, he requests grace of the Lord to act rightly while under the trial. From verses 7-12, he seeks protection from his foes, whom he graphically describes; and in verses 13 and 14, he pleads that they may be disappointed – closing the Psalm in the most comfortable confidence that all would certainly be well with himself at the last!



As we have already seen, this Psalm is a prayer. Feigned prayers are fruitless; but if our hearts lead our prayers – as the Psalmist’s heart did (verse 1) – God will meet those prayers with His favor. David was a man who was accustomed to praying frequently, and so it was not merely because he was in a state of distress and danger that he now engaged himself in sending petitions to the throne of grace. And he was encouraged, by his faith, to

expect that God would surely hear His supplications.

Constant resolution and watchfulness against sins of the tongue (verse 3) will be good evidence of our integrity. Being aware of man’s natural propensity to wicked works, and of his own peculiar temptations, David had made God’s Word his preservative from the destructive paths of Satan. Those who, through grace, are walking in the paths of the Lord should pray that their goings may be held up in those paths. That is exactly what David prays here: “Lord, hold me up.” Those who desire to proceed and persevere in the ways of God must, by prayer, get fresh supplies of grace and strength from Him daily.

Being surrounded by his enemies, David prays to God to keep him in safety. This part of his prayer is a prediction that Christ would be preserved through all the hardships and difficulties of His humiliation, to ultimately enjoy the glories and joys of His exalted state. And this is also a pattern for Christians to learn from; we ought to commit the keeping of our souls to the Lord – trusting Him to preserve them to His heavenly Kingdom.

Most people look on the things of this world as the best things; and they look no further, nor show any care to secure the enjoyment of a better life in heaven. The things of this world are called treasures; but to the believer, when these things are compared with eternal blessings, they are nothing except trash. The most afflicted Christian does not need to envy even the most prosperous men of the world, who have their portion in this life alone. Being clothed with Christ’s righteousness, His people have – through His grace – a good heart and a good life. May we, by faith, behold the Lord’s face and set Him always before us! When we wake up every morning, may we be satisfied with His likeness that is set before us in His Word – and also with His likeness that is stamped upon us by His renewing grace. Happiness in the next world is prepared only for those who are justified and sanctified in this world; they shall be put in possession of it when the body awakes, at the resurrection, out of its slumber in the grave. There is no satisfaction for a soul except in God, and in His good will toward us, and in His good work in us; but that satisfaction will not be perfect until we come to heaven.

Lord Jesus, let Your covenant-blessings be ours; and thus – after enjoying, by faith, the sweetness of Your love here – we shall one day arise up to the full and everlasting enjoyment of You and Your salvation, to all eternity! Amen.