

Rev. Bob Canode

“My Refuge and My Portion” Psalm 142 sermon

This psalm was written apparently about a time when King David was hiding in a cave somewhere. We know from the history of David’s life given to us in 1 Samuel that Saul, the first king of Israel, was jealous of David.

The LORD singled David out and appointed him as the next king of Israel. Saul had sinned as king therefore God stripped away the kingdom from him and gave it to David. The LORD had led Samuel to David, Jesse’s youngest son, and Samuel anointed David with oil and the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward.

So then in a semi-private ceremony before his brothers young David was anointed King. Even though David was given the Spirit of the LORD, and even though the prophet Samuel had anointed David consecrating him as king, there was some time that elapsed before Saul was actually removed from power and David took his rightful place on the throne.

In fact after David had slain Goliath, securing a great victory for Israel, his fame among the people began to grow. And because of this, while even serving in Saul’s house, David became the object of Saul’s hatred and jealousy. This hatred for David eventually led to David being forced to flee from Saul and hide in caves so as not to be killed.

It was in the context of experiencing intense suffering and feelings of loneliness and forsakenness then that David wrote Psalms like this. In this Psalm David in his suffering cries out to God in prayer and finds assurance that the LORD is his refuge and portion.

David under the inspiration of the Spirit, shows us in the beginning that he not only prayed in his spirit and in his mind, but he prayed out loud with his voice. Two times he says that he cried to the LORD “with is voice”; “*with my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD*”

The subtitle says that David prayed this prayer while he was hiding in a cave. Again we see in Scripture a couple of times that David hid in caves while fleeing from the violent persercution of Saul. These are the cries then of one whose life is one the line. He is at the point of death.

The darkness of death, the prospect of death has overwhelmed him. We see this in the Psalm in verse 3 where he says that his enemies have set a trap for him; “*in the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me*” (v.3).

This trap he refers to here is one like that of a bird trap placed on the ground that hunters use to trap and kill birds. The prophet Amos spoke of a trap like this when he was prophesying about the certain judgment that was coming upon Israel for her sins.

In chapter 3 of Amos the LORD says, “*Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing?*”

In Psalm 124 David speaks of the LORD rescuing Israel from people who sought to swallow them up alive, kill them. He praises God saying, “*Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their*

teeth! We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped!”

And so it is clear that David’s life is seriously threatened here. And if he was in fact in a cave when he prayed this prayer then he invites us here to hear the sound of his voice filling the walls of the cave as the prospect of death creates all kinds of anxiety and pain for him.

He said that his soul was fading away within him. In verse 3 he says, “*when my soul faints within me...*”. In verse 4 he asks the LORD to take notice of his loneliness and what would seem to be utter forsakenness: “*Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul*”

David feels as though his life is slipping away from him, he is sure to die and there is no help for him. He speaks of the land of the living in verse 5. He fears he will be taken away from this place, “the land of the living”.

And as he looks around he sees three ways in which he has determined that he is utterly alone and he invites the LORD to take account of this fact. First he says there is no one who takes notice of him in verse 4, that is to say there is no one who sees his misery, recognizes his need, then moved by compassion does something to help him.

Next he says there is no refuge; “*no refuge remains to me*”. All earthly hopes have perished, they have vanished away. So then no one sees his dire situation and recognizes his profound need, any hope he had in the land of the living, whether it be a sword or armies of men or his swiftness of foot, any earthly refuge has disappeared, no refuge remains for him.

And finally he says no one cares for my soul. There is no one who seeks to preserve his life. He has no protector. He is completely vulnerable, stripped of any sort of outside care or protection from death.

The fact that he asks the LORD to look to his right and see that there is no one there possibly refers to David feeling as though he has been judged guilty in a court of law and there is no one *on his right side* to defend his case against his accusers, who would have also been on his right side in a Jewish court of law.

We this language used in a judicial sense for example in another Psalm of David’s, Psalm 109. There he asks God to judge the wicked as guilty in a court of law: “*Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at this right hand. When he is tried, let him come forth guilty...*” (Psalm 109:6)

And so David perhaps feels as though a guilty verdict has been handed down to him, he stands accused, ready to be executed on account of his crimes. And he is in three different ways without a defendant or protector.

This is interesting here that this cry from David comes from his mouth while in the very act of seeking refuge in a cave. And the two instances that we have in Scripture of David hiding in caves we know that he had men with him. So it may have been the case that David was not alone, physically and numerically speaking, when he prayed this prayer.

But the point is that didn’t matter. Men and caves provided no real refuge for him. The gloom of death had entered his soul. He was made to feel small and abandoned because of the humiliation of suffering. He says in verse 6, “*attend to my cry for I am brought low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me*”

In other words David was certain he would die and therefore he felt as though he was guilty of a crime punishable only by death and was therefore in a prison or dungeon awaiting his execution: “*bring me out of prison...*” he prays to God in verse 7.

Jonah was not in a cave but he prayed prayer from the belly of a fish using similar language after he had been thrown into the depths of the sea. He said, “*I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever yet you brought up my life from the pit (and so just as with David, Jonah felt as if he was thrown in a dungeon, in his case it was a watery dungeon, not a rocky one like David’s here)*”

...when my life was fainting away (same word that David uses when he says, “my spirit faints within me”) I remembered the LORD and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple...” (Jonah 2:7)

And so once again it is very clear that David has been pushed to the brink of death. But unlike Jonah, David, when he prayed these words, had not yet experienced the Lord’s deliverance. Death was a very real prospect for him, it had hemmed him in on every side.

David had options at this point. He could have simply given up, succumbed to his situation without ever voicing his concerns to His Lord. Or he could have used his voice to blame God and to curse Him for his fate.

Or he could have used his voice to lay the blame on his men, if they were with him. The uncertainty of his plight might have caused anger to well up inside him because he felt as though he was not in control. And he could have used his voice to unleash that anger upon God and upon all those around him.

Remember David was righteous in this context. He had done nothing to Saul that would justify Saul’s hatred of him. In fact it seems as though it was precisely because David had been anointed King and given God’s Spirit that he endured such intense suffering.

David might have thought his anointing established for him a right to receive a fast track to the throne. But David does none of these things. As one writer put it he does not complain about God but brings his complaints to God.

This prayer is not so much a complaint, as it is a deep concern or a cry for help. This is the language David uses. He says, “*with my voice I cry out to the LORD, with my voice I plead for mercy, I tell my trouble before him”*”

David, pressed to the end of himself, uses the strength of his voice to pray to God. This is what prayer is friends, it is an offering up of our souls to God. It is a spiritual sacrifice of the soul to God through the mediation of Christ.

David defines it as crying out, pleading for mercy, telling his trouble. And he does not tell God all the details of his emotions and of his situation because he things God doesn’t know them. God does know them. He knows every detail. He alone knows our hearts. He has full knowledge of every decision we make, every step we take, and every sin, hidden or not, that is committed against us and by us.

In fact as David prays here he acknowledges God’s omniscience. He says in verse 3 “*when my spirit faints within me, you know my way”* When we pray this way to God, pouring out our desires and the details of our situation, we do not enlighten Him of information He did not already have, but in prayer we do draw near to God.

In our prayers, in our cries for help we draw near to God and voice our desires to the One who alone can help us, the One who is our only true Refuge in the land of the living when the prospect of death confronts us. This is what David affirms in his complaint in verse 5, *“I cry to you O LORD I say, ‘you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’”*

David had the portion of his rightful place of honor in the kingdom taken from him. He did not have a portion in the Promised Land. This too was withheld from him as he was violently pursued by Saul. But in this isolation and in communion with His God he found that his true portion in the land of the living was God Himself.

“You are my refuge, my portion” he says. In fellowship with God we find our life and our portion.

By faith David also shows that He trusts in God His refuge and that his salvation will be brought about not simply for his own good and glory, but to bring glory to God. He says in verse 2, *“bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!”*

This is incredible, David does not pray for deliverance just so his pain will end but that he might praise God! David trusts in God and trusts also that once delivered the saints would be drawn to his joy in the salvation God worked; *“bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me”* (v.7)

What a glorious journey of emotions David goes through here as he travels from deep lamentation over the prospect of death to the joy of hoping in God and knowing He will do good to him.

Beloved we know many of us have experienced the hard truth that our prayers are not always answered by God in the way we would like to see them answered in this life. But through our communion with Him in prayer and through our suffering we come to know that God is our portion.

And that He knows our paths and He works eternal good for us in every situation. And in answer to our prayers God does this so that we might glorify Him and give thanks to Him.

Beloved as we meditate on this prayer from David, we must consider the cries of the greater David, Jesus Christ. According to His human nature Christ fully experienced the agony of being brought to the point of death. David was righteous in regard to his relationship with Saul. But he was not sinless.

Christ was without sin. He was truly righteous. He was the true King of Israel. David in fact was but a faint reflection of the glory of the true King Jesus Christ. Christ experienced the pains of being bound by persecutors. They laid a trap for him. And in the end he was left alone.

They then crucified Him and as His Spirit fainted away, He cried out, *“My God, My God why have you forsaken me?”*. He then yielded up His spirit into the hands of His Father and died.

Why did King David even have to deal with the prospect of death? Why did King Jesus die? Because the wages of sin is death. David suffered as a sinner in a sin cursed world and as one being sinned against by wicked sinful people.

Christ suffered as the sinless One who was offering Himself up as a sacrifice to save sinners. As He did this friends, Christ in His human nature, truly suffered. And He cried out to His Father when He was in need. *“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”*

The Bible tells us that Christ used His voice to cry out to His Father as David did here. And the Father answered His Son’s cries. He delivered Him from His prison, and raised Him from the dead.

And Christ endured this suffering and death so that the saints, you and I, might be gathered around Him and give thanks to Him. Friends, as we go through trials, as we face the prospect of death, let us use our voices to bring our concerns to God in prayer.

Notice how very personal and private this prayer is. This is speech from David to God and David doesn't include collective pronouns like "we" and "us". He feels alone and says to God, "I" cry out, "I" tell my trouble, deliver "me", you deal bountifully with "me". This was the essence of Christ's prayer in the garden and now in union with Christ we take these words upon our lips as well. And as we look to Christ we are assured that He knows our way. He is our refuge and He will deal bountifully with us.