

Notes on Psalm 27—35

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Psalm 27

Opponents to our faith do us good in this respect: they make us focus on what we want. This man could have given way to fear of his enemies but rather, they set his heart to seek God and made him realise that there was only one thing he wanted and that was the knowledge and favour of his covenant Lord. Parents could not provide the assurance that his God had provided. As he thought on this, already he knew God had heard his prayer and defeated his enemies.

Our covenant Lord, Jesus Christ, has defeated the great enemies: death, and accusation, and the devil who rules by the fear of them. Christ rules in all the places life takes us. Let it be my life's occupation to know him and the power of his resurrection (Phil. 3:7–14).

Psalm 28

Not to be heard by God would to be as though dead already. There are many whose only expectation is from their own wranglings and deceptions in the world and this writer pleaded with God that he may not be judged with them. Rather, his heart had been tutored by the record of God's saving actions for his people. Now, as he thought on these deeds, he knew his prayer was heard. God was the Shepherd of his people. Well may the person who thinks on Christ, the good Shepherd, rest content that his or her cries have been heard by God.

Psalm 29

A fearsome storm spoke to the writer about the victory God had won over his enemies by his word. (There are similarities between this song and the Song of Moses in Exodus 15.) Well may the world be in awe of the God who speaks. Through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the forgiveness of God has been proclaimed, attested by God's raising him from the dead. Here, a powerful word has reached our conscience and gone out to the world:

'The voice of grace

Whose intimations are like thunders

Filling the voids

With love and joy and peace.'

The heavenly assembly (literally 'sons of God') should lead the praise, and all his people may be at peace because of the strength he has given to them.

Prayer

Lord, bitter are the enemies ranged against your people. Deadly demons seek to subvert the faith your people have in you. Humanity joins the fray, though not knowing what they do. Father, you alone are my desire. The power and healing of your Son Jesus Christ and the love of your Spirit taking me on into life are all I could want. Let not those who oppose this witness in the world gain the upper hand. May they too hear the thundering of your voice and know that there is no power greater than yours. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

Psalm 30

A life of faith in God is not a straight or level road. The Lord may favour us and make us strong, but may also show his anger, or hide his face, or bring us near to death. Our faith in Jesus Christ is much more precious than gold and is purified so that it may not be confused with lesser trusts (I Peter 1:6–9).

By his experience, this singer was now sure that God's mercy outdistanced his wrath, that no earthy power could rival God, that death could not be his master, and that though he had no claim on God for a trouble free life, God heard his prayers. Images of the gloating of faithless people were now replaced with delight in God.

Psalm 31

Between his affirmations of faith in God as his Redeemer, the writer also spoke of the cunning of those who sought to wipe out his testimony (those who pay heed to worthless idols) and the betrayal of those who could not bear to stand with him in his trial. But his faith grew even as the hopelessness of his situation weighed in on him (he had spoken in his alarm of being abandoned by God). He asked to be saved and confessed that any future for his life would be wholly a matter of God's doing because he cast himself wholly on God's steadfast love.

What happened to turn the song into praise we will never know. Perhaps, the help he sought came from God, or perhaps the assurance of deliverance came and he could speak of being delivered before the event. Whatever, this person's faith had become a public event (v. 19) and God would not allow him to be shamed.

Christ prayed publicly from his cross 'Into your hand I commit my spirit.' Through the bearing of our shame and wrestling with the opponents of God he has become the Author and Finisher of our faith. God heard his prayer and raised him from death. In Christ's name most truly we can pray 'he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me.' Jesus himself instructs us, 'Be strong, and let your heart take courage.'

Prayer

Gracious Father, keep strong in my mind the victory you have accomplished for us all through your Son. By your Spirit, stir up in me the understanding of what you have done to establish us in your presence. When the hatred of those who hate you engulfs me and it seems that you are not present, Lord, save me! May those who despise you and make sport of those who trust in you not have reason to gloat on my account. I thank you for Christ who has pioneered and perfected the faith I now have. May the hearts of all your people be strengthened, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Psalm 32

Like the happiness given to those who keep the law (Psalm 1) is the happiness given to those who are forgiven for breaking it. Paul said that in being forgiven, David had been reckoned righteous by God (Rom. 4:6–8). So, let all the righteous ‘shout for joy’ (v. 11). The case of those who hide their sins is so different. Their very bodies cry out with the weight of sin they carry. Only one has borne the full weight of sin, our sins, and come through it, and that was by a resurrection. Well may we come and confess our sins to such a God! Come then! Don’t be stubborn! God is a hiding place for us all, a hiding place from our own sins.

Psalm 33

Behind the world we see is the word of the Lord, and so the creation itself bears the character of the one who made it: faithfulness, righteousness, justice and steadfast love. The counsel or considered purpose of God can bring to nought all this world’s counsel. So, let there be great joy among those who walk in God’s paths, and let all the earth fear him.

Yet not all see this character of the creation and the purpose of its Maker. So who are these people who fear God? They are the nation God made his own by saving them and revealing his will to them. They are his holy church whom he has raised up in his Son to know him as he is and to recognise him as this world’s Maker and Father. As God looks at the world and does as he chooses, his eye alights with favour on those who have been tutored to trust in him.

Prayer

Lord, my heart delights in you because you have delivered me from the burden of being my own creator, and my own justifier. What freedom, to come to you as the sinner I am and be forgiven. Thank you for the gift of your Son who has borne the sins of the whole world. I thank you that your purpose will prevail and not the purposes of this world’s architects and saviours. Lord, my hope is in you, my heart is made strong with your joy. Let your steadfast love rest on me and all who hope in you, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Psalm 34

The alternatives presented in this psalm are praise or shame. Though wretched of himself (v. 6), and broken hearted (v. 18), the writer had found the Lord able to meet every need. Though constantly afflicted as God’s righteous person, God would save him and not condemn him. So he made a habit of giving thanks to God for his constant interventions. He would not glory in himself but in the Lord.

When this writer says that by doing good we will attract the favour of God, he is speaking to children, covenant children. God has provided a way of living in this sinful world, by being assured that he remains bonded to us though we are sinners, and that he provides atonement for our sins. Our gratefulness for this is to refrain from the sins we would commit if we had no such covenant. Mere refraining from evil could not place us in the covenant. That is a sovereign act of God’s mercy.

The apostle John saw that such faith was a prophecy of Christ and noted that his bones were not broken on the cross (John 19:36). He may also be saying that Jesus

was a Passover lamb (Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12). Christ's afflictions were many; all the afflictions of being our sin bearer. But he was delivered out of them all. This is the covenant assurance we have that we also may glory in the God who has raised our covenant Head from the dead, and he will raise us up also.

Psalm 35

On the surface, this prayer seems understandable enough. One man was set upon by others stronger than himself. They were the people he had served as his friends. He asked God to take his side against them and demolish them because they had acted treacherously and falsely and with pleasure in his downfall. Our history is littered with people who have prayed such prayers but been fighting battles of their own, not the Lord's. Their unwarranted indignation makes us wonder if ever a sinner could pray a prayer like this. What manner of battle was going on?

First, the psalmist was not aggressive (v. 20), he had served his assailants (vv. 13–14), their attack on him was groundless (v. 19), he had left vengeance for God to exercise in righteousness (v. 24), he hoped to be the occasion of many giving thanks to God (v. 27) and was concerned more for God's righteousness than his own (v. 28).

In short, he was angry but did not sin (Eph. 4:26). To be such is required of us who have put on Christ, who are being renewed in mind and know we are members of one another, people who know the devil's devices and give him no room. Paul guarded his own heart to avoid having any other enemies than the enemies of the gospel, but where he knew that his opponents were demolishing the one way that people could have peace with God, his attack was unremitting (e.g. I Cor. 16:22).

Prayer

Father, teach me to glory only in you. The afflictions of my life have served to show the vanity of worldly glory. But there is a glory which I seek dearly and that is that your righteousness may prevail and that many may delight in you. Grant that my own life may serve this purpose. You have given us Jesus Christ that our whole humanity may be lived in him. Then keep me mindful of him and the grace that is mine in him that I may fight no battles which are not his. For his name's sake I pray. Amen.