



OVERVIEW

Author:

King David (c. 1040-970 B.C.)

Outline:

David, with a troubled conscience, prays for the Lord's mercy (v. 1-6)
David asks to hear the Gospel preached (v. 7-8)
David prays for deliverance (v. 9-10)
David's confident final petitions (v. 11-12)

St. Augustine on Psalm 143:

"Let us seek then in this Psalm our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, announcing Himself beforehand in His prophecy, and foretelling what should happen at this time by things which were done long ago," (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VIII:651).

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Around the Word BIBLE STUDY

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The Penitential Psalms Psalm 143

PSALM 143

A Psalm of David.

- ¹Hear my prayer, O LORD;
give ear to my pleas for | mercy!*
- In your faithfulness answer me, in your |
righteousness!
- ²**Enter not into judgment with your |
servant,***
**for no one living is righteous be- | fore
you.**
- ³For the enemy has pursued my soul;
he has crushed my life | to the ground;*
- he has made me sit in darkness like | those
long dead.
- ⁴**Therefore my spirit faints with- | in me;***
my heart within me | is appalled.
- ⁵I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that | you have done;*
- I ponder the work | of your hands.
- ⁶**I stretch out my | hands to you;***
**my soul thirsts for you like a | parched
land.**
- ⁷Answer me quickly, O LORD!
My | spirit fails!*
- Hide not your face from me,
lest I be like those who go down | to the pit.
- ⁸**Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast
love, for in | you I trust.***
**Make me know the way I should go,
for to you I lift | up my soul.**
- ⁹Deliver me from my enemies, | O LORD!*
- I have fled to you for | refuge!
- ¹⁰**Teach me to do your will,
for you | are my God!***
**Let your good Spirit lead me
on | level ground!**
- ¹¹For your name's sake, O LORD, pre- | serve my
life!*
- In your righteousness bring my soul out of |
trouble!
- ¹²**And in your steadfast love you will cut off
my | enemies,***
**and you will destroy all the adversaries of
my soul, for I am your | servant.**
Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit.
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.

Introduction

David is in trouble, so he turns to the Lord and His Word for comfort and peace. He prays that the Lord would not look upon His sin, but rather make His face to shine upon him. In the middle of the psalm David prays that he would hear a sermon of the Gospel. The psalm closes with a prayer of confident faith; faith by which David knows the love of the Lord. This last penitential psalm is saturated with Gospel comfort.

v. 1: "Hear my prayer"

The Psalms often begin by asking to the Lord to hear our prayers. Take a look at the first verses of Psalm 141 and 142, for example. We remember that standing before the Lord is a privilege granted to us by His grace. How does David want God to answer Him here in Psalm 143:1? To what two Divine characteristics does David appeal?

v. 2: "No one living is righteous"

What is David asking for in this verse? Why?

According to this verse, who is righteous? How does Romans 3:20-23 teach the same doctrine?

"Before you"

We often forget that our lives are lived *coram Deo* (before God). What happens when we consider our lives in the context of God's holiness? See Amos 7:6-9.

v. 3-4: "My spirit faints within me"

The "enemy" of v. 3 is the devil. He is the one who brings accusations of our sins before the throne of God (see Job 1:6-11 and Revelation 12:10. Remember "Satan" is the Hebrew word meaning "accuser."). The devil also brings his accusations to our soul, tempting us to despair. How do these two verses describe the terrified or despairing conscience?

v. 5-6: "I remember"

What four things does David do when his spirit faints?

The picture of v. 6 is of a cracked and dusty desert floor, desperate for the smallest rain. Compare this

with the image of Psalm 1:3. How are the images different? Can we understand David's four-fold actions as a return to God's Word which nourishes and enlivens his soul?

v. 7: "Quickly!"

David is desperate for the Lord's help. His sorrow is overwhelming, pressing him down into the grave. He knows that his only hope is in the Gospel, which reveals the Lord's mercy and kindness. David longs for the face of the Lord.

See Numbers 6:22–27. This is how the priests were to bless the people. What did the priests say about the Lord's face? How would this comfort David?

Martin Luther once noted that the pagan doesn't care if God frowns or smiles at them (*Large Catechism*, First Commandment, 36). David is not pagan; he is praying for God's smile!

v. 8: "Your steadfast love"

The Hebrew word for "steadfast love" is *hesed* (חֶסֶד), a word that wraps up all of the good and gracious things that God is and does into two syllables. The Lord's *hesed* is the grace, kindness, mercy, and love which He won for us by the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus. Here David is praying that he would audibly hear the proclamation of God's *hesed*. In other words, David is asking God for a sermon. He wants to *hear* the preaching of the Gospel, the forgiveness of his sins.

See Luke 10:25–28 for an example of Law preaching and 2 Corinthians 5:21 for an example of preaching the Gospel. How are these two ways of preaching different? What are the different results from hearing the preaching of God's wrath versus hearing the preaching of God's grace?

The preaching of the Gospel does not require works, only faith. What word does David use to describe faith in this verse?

v. 9–10: "Deliver... teach... let"

What three petitions does David offer in these two verses?

"Refuge" is a theme that runs throughout the Psalms. A "refuge" is a castle, a place of defense where the assaults of the enemy cannot reach us. (If you have time, read Psalms 46 and 62 and look for the images of refuge, rock, and fortress.)

In a time when armies would come marching through the countryside, castles were places of great comfort, rest, and peace. How is the promise of forgiveness a refuge to us? How does the Gospel shelter us? How is God's mercy our defense?

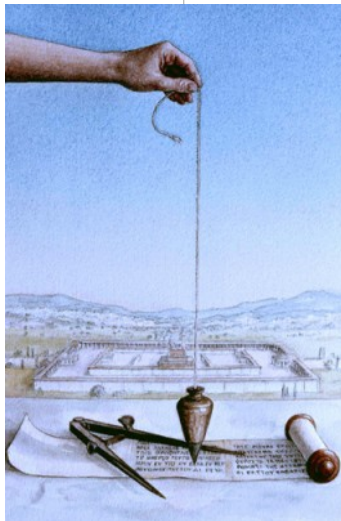
v. 11–12: The Final Petitions of Faith

David's prayer ends on a note of confident faith, expressing his trust in the Lord's mercy and confidence that his prayers will be answered. He asks the Lord not to hear his prayer for his own sake, but for the sake of the Lord's Name. This, then, is a prayer in the Name of the

Lord. Notice the use of the Lord's Name (Hebrew: *Yahweh* [יהוה]); ESV: LORD) in vs. 1, 7, 9, and 11. Each time David directly addresses *Yahweh* by His personal name in this psalm, he asks for something. What are the four things he asks for? What is it about these four petitions that warrant the invocation of God's Name? Why might David not have used the more generic "God" (Hebrew: *elohim* [אֱלֹהִים]), or simply asked God without using His name at all?

"Preserve my life..."

Compare this to v. 3 and 7. How will the Lord answer David's prayer?



In v. 11 David prays by the Lord's name and righteousness, and in v. 12 he appeals to the Lord's *hesed*, His steadfast love. In v. 11 David prays for forgiveness, and in v. 12 he prays for protection from the devil. How do these petitions match up with the petitions of the Lord's Prayer? ("forgive us our trespasses" and "deliver us from evil") How could we use the three petitions of these last verses in our own prayers?

Conclusion

David is in trouble. What does he do? Where does he turn? What does he find? Look for specific words and phrases in the Psalm. How is this comfort, peace, and forgiveness also for us?

Closing Hymn: From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee

1. From depths of woe I cry to Thee,
Lord, hear me, I implore Thee.
Bend down Thy gracious ear to me,
My prayer let come before Thee.
If Thou rememberest each misdeed,
If each should have its rightful meed,
Who may abide Thy presence?

5. Though great our sins and sore our woes,
His grace much more aboundeth;
His helping love no limit knows,
Our utmost need it soundeth.
Our shepherd good and true is He,
Who will at last His Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow.

(Martin Luther, 1524. TLH 329:1,5)

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