**Prayer and praise for help**  1/10/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 28, Romans 8:31-39

Text: Psalm 28

Psalms: 1, 14, 103:1-11, 134

‘Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless’ (1Sam 26:9). David spoke these words to Abishai as they stood, spear in hand, over King Saul. Saul and the army of Israel were out hunting for David to kill him. But David refused to take personal revenge and kill ‘the Lord’s anointed’, the man the Lord had anointed king over his people. Such was David’s respect for the person and the institution that the Lord had established within the community of his covenant people.

David’s son, Absalom, had no such respect for the Lord’s anointed, as in King David. He plotted to remove David from the throne and install himself as king. According to the words of David just referred to, this would make him guilty before the Lord. The Bible tells us that Absalom was killed by Joab in the brief civil war that he started.

We do not live in a theocracy or monarchy like ancient Israel, but still the Bible tells us to respect and not resist the governing authorities because they have been appointed by God (Rom 13:1,2). The church is more like Israel in that it is the community of God’s covenant people. In the church the Lord has set positions of authority, and appoints men for these positions. We are told to ‘obey those who rule over you and be submissive’ (Heb 13:17). At the first presbytery of the church, held in Jerusalem, no one regarded himself as above the authority of this court. The apostles, including Peter and Paul, were present along with elders, and all respected the decision of this court. They did not go the way of Absalom, and many others, in rejecting the authority of the Lord’s anointed person or persons.

Psalm 28 is a psalm of David but nothing is said of the circumstances in which he wrote it. Some think he was desperately ill, but clearly this king was being attacked by wicked men, as in the preceding psalms. David fleeing Jerusalem to escape the rebellion of his son seems a fitting background, but we cannot be certain. The psalm is a prayer, a prayer for the Lord to hear and answer his cry and not be silent. David feared going ‘down to the pit’ with the wicked. He calls on the Lord to justly judge the wicked, people who showed no regard for the works of the Lord. When the Lord heard and answered his cry David praised Him, and sought the Lord’s blessing on all the people. Our subheadings are: hear and answer, justice, heard, and, shepherd.

**1. Hear and answer**

This psalm, like many (Ps 26) begins with David crying to the Lord in prayer; in other psalms he reflects on the Lord’s grace and power before launching into prayer (Ps 27). He is in the house of the Lord lifting up his hands toward the Most Holy Place (28:2). Inside the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant, God’s earthly throne. It is interesting that this ark was carried by the priests as David fled Jerusalem, until David told them to take it back to the city (2Sam 15:25). David understood that he was in God’s hands, not the other way around. Let us never think that we have God in our hands ready to do our will: ‘Not my will but yours be done’.

David cries to the Lord, to Yahweh, the covenant name of God. He calls the Lord, ‘my Rock’, a metaphor he uses in other psalms, often in association with the words ‘fortress’ and ‘strength’. David prays for the Lord to help him because he knew the Lord is powerful to help him. What he did not know was, would the Lord help him? As David fled Jerusalem and sent the ark back he said, ‘If I find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back’ (2Sam 15:25). The Lord might not have delighted in him because he had sinned. If we confess our sin the Lord will hear our prayer and forgive us, but if we cherish sin in our heart and do not humbly seek forgiveness, the Lord will not hear (Ps 66:18).

If the Lord is silent and not answering our prayer we should be concerned. We should be examining our heart and confessing our sin. It may be that the Lord is making us wait, testing us as he tested Job. At the end of the previous psalm David urges us to ‘wait on the Lord’, but waiting on the Lord does not mean sitting down and doing nothing; it means crying to the Lord day and night because your life, or maybe the life of others, depends on Him answering your prayer. When the Lord hears your prayer he answers; that’s how we know he has heard us. The Lord is powerful to save when, in his mercy, he chooses to save.

David was pleading with the Lord in the house of the Lord, pleading for his life. He was lifting up his hands, as was the custom, while facing the Most Holy Place, the place where the Lord chose to dwell among his people. He feared he would die if the Lord did not hear his cry and act to save him. He feared going down to the pit with the wicked (28:1). The pit refers to ‘Sheol’, the place of the dead.

In verse 3 and in other psalms, David speaks of being careful not to sit with wicked men lest he go down with them when they are judged by God (Ps 1:1, 26:5). Do you ever stop to think how it would look to Jesus if he found you in the company of wicked men or women doing something wicked when he returns? Would it not be better to be found in God’s house worshipping him when he returns?

**2. Justice**

When Jesus does return, as he has promised he will, he will judge the living and the dead; he will judge the world in righteousness (1Tim 4:1, Acts 17:31). As people made in the image of God, we have an innate sense of justice; children know what is fair without being taught. But as sinners we do not act justly or even seek justice as we should. We see widows and orphans and the poor being denied justice. As believers in Jesus Christ we may experience injustice for his names sake. We may see the Lord destroy the wicked, or maybe not. But we believe that God is just and will destroy the wicked one day, on the Day of Judgment. In his vision into heaven, John saw martyred men and women, those killed for their unyielding confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, crying out for justice, for God to ‘judge and avenge our blood’ (Rev 6:9,10).

People today, mainly politicians, speak about being ‘on the right side of history’. When they do so, please tell them that the right side to be on is the side of the Lord; the creator God rules over this world and all the nations and all its history. God raises up one leader and puts another down. At the end of history it will be God deciding who is on the right side and who is on the wrong side. God not only created this world in which we live, and rules over the nations, he has set a day when this world will come to its end, when history gives way to eternity. The question we need to be asking is, ‘Where will I spend eternity?’

David did not want to be identified with the wicked in any way, lest he go down to the pit with them. He wanted to be separate from them; yes, he wanted to be exclusive not inclusive. David did not listen to wicked worldly people calling him to be inclusive, and neither should we. Churches that try to be ‘inclusive’ are in a perilous situation. David knew the commands of the Lord and the demands of being in a covenant relationship with the Lord. He was king, but still it was not for him to be changing God’s holy law; he was king under God. Every ruler and leader today must understand what the Bible says about them being ‘appointed by God’ (Rom 13:1). We, as Christ’s church, should remind them of this, even as we remind them that we pray for them. We can also remind them that they are appointed by God to deliver justice for all. In a democracy the people get to elect their leader, and we recognise that this person is a sinner like the rest of the people, but still we pray for justice and peace and for freedom to worship God as he has ordained.

David was man of integrity, a man who walked in the fear of God. But this was not true of many people, certainly not of his son Absalom. Wicked people or ‘workers of iniquity’, are hypocrites, people who say one thing and do another, people who say ‘peace’ when evil is on their hearts (26:3). Remember Jesus condemning the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy; they would pray for a widow while ‘devouring’ her house (Mat 23:14). How many of our state or church leaders are more focused on their own house than they are in the Lord’s house.

David did not take revenge upon the Lord’s anointed or on anyone but entrusted himself into the hands of the Lord. Rather than take up his sword he turned to the Lord in prayer. He knew the Lord would avenge or vindicate him (Ps 26:1). He knew this because the Lord delivers justice to the oppressed. David expected the Lord to deliver justice, and I am sure you do also. We expect the Lord to judge the wicked, to repay them for their wicked works. We speak of a person getting their just desserts and of divine retribution. The Lord is slow to anger and to condemn, but no one will escape God rendering to them what they deserve (28:4). In making a covenant with his people, the Lord declared through Moses blessings and curses according to obedience or disobedience respectively. Let no one say that God is being unjust when he punishes us for our sin.

The wicked or the foolish choose to disregard the works and the words of the Lord (28:5). ‘The fool says in his heart there is no God’ (Ps 14:1). As it was in David’s day, so it remains to day. If you reject the call of the Lord Jesus upon your life and continue thumbing your nose at his commands, you will be held responsible, personally responsible by almighty God. David feared to sit with the wicked let alone walk with them because he knew their end. He knew that God will destroy them or tear them down and not build them up (28:5). God ordered the destruction, the utter destruction of the Canaanites because of their sin, and in his justice he will destroy those in Israel who turn their backs on him to worship idols.

The Lord will deliver justice in the end, so even if you are prospering in your worldly ways today, remember there will be a day of divine accounting. Even as he preached the gospel, the righteousness of God which is by grace through faith, Paul, like Jesus, reminded people of God’s wrath that remains upon the wicked (Rom 1:18, John 3:36). No one will be able to claim ignorance, certainly not you who are hearing God’s word today. If you are a person who fears the Lord and believes that Jesus is coming again in judgment, are you warning people you know, perhaps members of your own family, that they will be judged according to the works of their hands? The only way to escape divine judgment is to accept divine salvation as it is made clear to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**3. Heard**

David began by crying to the Lord not to be silent. We are not told what he was praying about but he pleaded not to be dragged away with the wicked (28:3). The Lord heard his prayer and he turned to praising the Lord in the latter part of the psalm (28:6). Presumably the Lord delivered him from the wicked with their evil intentions. When David heard that Absalom was dead he was distraught but it did mean he could return to Jerusalem. Whatever the Lord delivered him from, David turned to the Lord giving thanks and praise.

He declares the Lord to be his strength and shield or protector (28:7). In sequence he says, I trusted in the Lord, I am helped, I rejoice, and I praise the Lord (28:7). David did not doubt but trusted in the Lord. What about you? Are your trusting in the Lord today? Are you praying to the Lord? He cannot hear or answer if you don’t pray! Are you rejoicing in answered prayer? ‘Forget not all his benefits’ (Ps 103:2).

**4. Shepherd**

In the closing verses David turns to the people, God’s people over whom he ruled as king. The Lord had saved him as the Lord’s anointed or ‘messiah’, and now he prays for the Lord to save and bless all his covenant people, otherwise called his ‘inheritance’ or his flock (28:8,9). The Lord is the true shepherd of the people, God’s people. We might look back to Psalm 23, and see verse 9 as wrapping up this shepherd theme.

The shepherd theme is taken up by Jesus, the Messiah who came from the royal line of David. Jesus calls himself the good shepherd who cares for the sheep, indeed who gives his life for the sheep (John 10:11). David speaks of the shepherd carrying them forever (28:9). Only Jesus can carry us forever. Is he carrying you? I close with the words of the doxology in Hebrew 13:20,21: ‘Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen’.