**A prayer with tears** 26/12/21 dkm

Read: Psalm 6, Philippians 1

Text: Psalm 6

Psalms: 23old, 16:7-11, 32:1-7, 134a

Our prayers may be prayers of thanksgiving and praise, prayers of petition, or prayers of penitence. If you have not prayed a prayer of penitence you are not a Christian; you have not pleaded with the Lord to forgive your sin so are still in your sin. The prayer you prayed when you first believed will not be your last prayer of penitence. As believers, we still sin against God, and as children of God we are chastened by God when we do so. Those whom the Lord loves he chastens. Whenever we suffer, be it from sickness or other trouble, we rightly examine our hearts to see if the Lord is chastening us because of sin. Yet not all suffering is because of sin, as we learn from the Book of Job. Even so, we, like Job, cry to Lord in times of sickness or trouble, knowing that he is merciful to forgive, and powerful to heal or deliver us from our trouble.

We come to the first of some seven so-called penitential psalms in the Psalter: Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143. Psalm 51 is probably the best known of such Psalms. The historical setting of that Psalm of David is given in the title, but the title of this Psalm gives no indication of its historical setting. The preceding Psalms seem to point to the setting of Psalm 3, namely, that of David fleeing from his wicked and violent son. This was a time of deep distress for David, and maybe he was asking why he was being humiliated as he fled for his life. But there is no indication in Psalm 3, or in any historical records, of David drenching his bed with tears (6:6).

We do not know why David was so distraught when he penned this Psalm but we can learn from this Psalm, and may even have cause to pray it ourselves. We have all been sick at some time, maybe so sick we thought we were going to die. We tend to ask God a lot of questions at such times. Since you are here today, maybe you join with David in saying, ‘The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping’ (6:8).

The title of Psalm 6 attributes it to David. As with the two previous Psalms, instructions are given to the ‘Chief Musician’ regarding the tune and/or instruments. Stringed instruments are again mentioned, along with another Hebrew word which our Bible is translated as ‘an eight stringed harp’, while other Bibles leave it untranslated.

This Psalm is short but it ‘packs a punch’ as we say. We are taken to the depths of despair, before being lifted to the heights of confidence in the Lord within a few verses. We will look at the verses as set out in our Bible, namely in four, two or three verse stanzas.

**1. Weak, so cries for mercy**

In great pain and suffering, David cries to the Lord. His body is weak and his soul is deeply troubled. Is it physical sickness that is causing his distress, or is it distress that is causing his physical sickness? We do not know, but we do know that one effects the other because we are whole, integrated human beings. We also know because he tells us later in the Psalm that people, as in ‘workers of iniquity’ were opposing him (6:8).

But there was more to his distress and suffering than wicked people threatening him. His first words are, ‘O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger’ (6:1). Whether it was only enemies, or enemies and sickness, that were affecting him to the point of death, David saw his affliction as chastening by the Lord. Strangely, he does not refer to sin as such, as he does in Psalm 51 and also in Psalm 38, but as in those two penitential Psalms, he refers to the chastening of the Lord. He acknowledges the ‘anger’ and ‘hot displeasure’ of the Lord, knowing that the Lord hates sin and justly punishes anyone who sins. All sin is against God (Ps 51:4), so God’s ‘hot displeasure’ is directed upon all sin. Remember that sin is breaking God’s holy law. ‘Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God’ (Shorter Catechism Q14).

Many people do not acknowledge their sin because they do not accept God’s holy law. They are in for a devastating shock when they are brought before the throne of almighty God for judgment. David, and you also I trust, know what sin is, and also know there is only one way to deal with sin, namely to confess it before almighty God. For those who confess and believe in Jesus, almighty God becomes a covenant God, a God who sets his love upon his children. In his covenant love, God hears the confession of his people and forgives their sin; this he does looking forward to, or back to, the cross of Christ. The Hebrew word for ‘covenant love’ is ‘*chesed*’, which is found in verse 4 and translated as ‘steadfast love’ in the ESV, but as ‘mercy’ in our NKJV Bible.

David did not claim any merit of his own as he came before the Lord, even though he may have been innocent with regard to the attacks of these enemies. We never have cause to claim merit before our holy God. Besides, David was too weak and distraught to be thinking of any merit or any way of helping himself. ‘Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am weak’ or faint, he cried (6:2). In a yet a third cry of, ‘O Lord’, he pleads for healing, for restoration of body and soul.

David continues wrestling with God in prayer as he cries yet again, a fourth time, ‘But You, O Lord - how long?’ (6:3). There was no one else to go to in his time of trouble. Even if it was the Lord chastening him, it was to the Lord that he must go. David never thought to go to another god or person in times of affliction. As in Psalm 119:71, he could say, ‘It was good that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes’. But at this point in his prayer he is not saying this! In fact, all he can utter is, ‘How long?’ We don’t know how long David had been suffering but he feels he cannot go on much longer. We might say to him, ‘God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it’ (1Cor 10:13), but I am sure David knew this.

**2. What happens if I die?**

‘The call for God to act is based on faith, even during a period of great stress. Again we hear his cry, ‘O Lord’, this time a cry for the Lord to turn his face towards him and save him (6:4). He appeals to the Lord to save him on the basis of his covenant love, suggesting his [David’s] death would reflect poorly on the covenant God had made with him. Moses made a similar plea on behalf of the Israelites when they sinned by making the golden calf. ‘Such appeals reach to the very depth of God’s heart and being. Beyond that there are no depths of appeal that can be reached’.

‘The grave’ in verse 5 is literally ‘*Sheol*’, the place of the dead. Without going into what David believed about life after death, it is clear to everyone that the dead cannot praise God here on earth. This is what David was telling the Lord in his prayer; death silences a man’s worship. David was a man who regularly and wholeheartedly praised God, so if he died his praise would not be going up to the Lord. The apostle Paul had a similar view of death, telling the Philippians that, ‘to remain in the flesh is more needful for you’ (Phil 1:24). If we plead with the Lord for more days to live here on earth, let it be for reasons of worship not self-indulgence!

**3. Weary from weeping**

David’s prayer continues, not by crying out, ‘O Lord’ but by reminding the Lord of the depths of his suffering. He has become weary from groaning day and night. He lies awake weeping, so much so that his bed gets soaked with his tears (6:6). More than once my pillow has absorbed my tears as I pleaded with the Lord for mercy. What about you? Maybe you lost your job and were desperately trying for another. Or maybe you had no money to buy food for dinner. Or maybe you were being bullied at school or at work.

David was in despair because of ‘all my enemies’ (6:7). He did not have a smart phone, with his enemies sending him vile and insulting text messages all through the night, but their verbal abuse rang in his ears day and night. The grief that his foes have caused him made his eyes become weak and old (6:7). His health was affected such that he was ageing prematurely.

**4. Workers of iniquity told to depart**

There is a sudden change of mood when we come to verse 8. David rises from prayer to confront his enemies, whom he calls, ‘all you workers of iniquity’ (6:8). He tells them that the Lord has heard his prayer, ‘the voice of my weeping’, and they must depart. In other words, ‘The Lord has heard my plea’ (6:9).

There is no mention of divine intervention, apart from a change in David’s heart while he prayed. His weeping turned to confidence and boldness to confront his enemies. He did not turn to violence or ridicule, but confidently told them to depart. His confidence was based in the Lord hearing his prayer and delivering him. ‘The Lord will receive my prayer’ (6:9). His confidence was based on him standing in the presence of the Lord and knowing that these ‘workers of iniquity could never stand in the presence of the Lord.

His enemies sought to humiliate and shame David through their verbal abuse, but while he was praying everything changed. David no longer felt ashamed but called on his enemies to be ashamed and greatly troubled (6:10). The closing words may simply be a statement, but may also be a final prayer to the Lord for vindication. Just as his perspective on his situation suddenly changed in verse 8, so he sees their situation suddenly changing as they departed from him, ashamed and humiliated. If you are facing verbal abuse, or are disturbed by what people are saying about you, have you brought this matter to the Lord? Do you believe the Lord is powerful to save you from any and all affliction?