

Text: Psalm 28

Title: O Lord My Rock

Occasion: Westminster Presbyterian Church

Date: August 11, AD 2013

Introduction

The Trinity Psalter sets Psalm 28, to the great tune Tallis Canon which with the great content of this Psalm itself, should serve to lock it in our minds and hearts. Locking this Psalm in our hearts and minds is my purpose as we come to the end of our summer in the Psalms. I remember the debate on the floor of the General Assembly of the PCA when considering the work of publishing the Trinity Psalter. While the purpose for publishing the Psalter was to once again have the Church sing the Psalms, to follow in the footsteps of the people of God from the OT through the NT and into the earliest days of the Church after the Apostles, and the recovery of the practice of singing Psalms at the time of the Reformation, and *not exclusive Psalmody*. It was clearly demonstrated that this involved simply obeying the command of the NT to sing Psalms to the Lord (I Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) and facing the reality that many hymnals have very, very few (one or two -23rd & Old Hundredth) Psalms and even the Trinity Hymnal does not have all the Psalms. Yet one well known professor from the denominational seminary rose to speak against the move with what sounded like a denigrating of the singing of Psalms by the Church, declaring that it would be “drawing the veil of Moses over the face of the bride of Christ.” Yet one commissioner reminded the assembly of the words of that great father of the church, Augustine: “The voice of Christ and His Church is well-nigh the only voice to be heard in the Psalms.” Thankfully the Assembly took action to approve the production of the Trinity Psalter.

Let us give attention to Psalm 28, where we hear David in the midst of grief and trouble moved by the Spirit in eloquence to plead to not be brought into the same disapproval and end with the workers of iniquity. He expresses his abhorrence of them. You remember that David serves as a type of our Lord so there is also this element of Christ’s intercessions as the representative of His people.

I. Seeking God in Christ

Ps. 28:1, “To You I will cry, O Lord my Rock: Do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.”

We know, but do not always practice, the immediate lesson set before us by the Psalmist: When we are in times of trouble we ought to give ourselves immediately to prayer and supplication to the Lord. But Calvin is surely right when he says, “Although men labor everywhere under a multitude of troubles, yet scarcely one in a hundred ever has recourse to God. Almost all having their consciences burdened with guilt, and having never

experienced the power of divine grace which might lead them to betake themselves to it, either proudly gnaw the bit or fill the air with unavailing complaints.” But then even we who have experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ; who have experienced the enlivening of the Spirit drawing us to Christ, yet we too know of this helplessness, this weariness of soul so that we simply sink into troubles, into, *Woe is me!* What are we to do? We need this firm, resolute, purposeful decidedness which says with the Psalmist: “To You will I cry.” How? Why? Because the Lord has spoken to us, calling upon us to fix our eye upon Him in faith, hope, and prayer: Jer. 33:3, “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” Ps. 50:15, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” *Call to Me*, says the Lord, and this is what the Psalmist did: “To You I will cry.” You see it is not simply the bare fact that all prayer to be prayer is to be directed to God, but this is the help in trouble - the definiteness of God Himself as the object of our calling out. Then

Do take to heart that description: “O Lord my Rock.” For what is the Lord as our great object of prayer? When you consider the readiness of the Lord to hear, His ability to give aid, then we can with good reason direct our cry to Him. Since the Lord is our Rock, our immovable foundation for all hopes and our refuge in time of trouble, then certainly our determination must answer in kind to the One to Whom we go. This is not some generalized notion that *God is just all love and sympathy for poor mankind.* Rather this is our Rock, the God who makes and keeps covenant and who does not change even when all else does! How does that support us? It is related about how a minister William Evans responded when facing death: “I am weakness itself,” he replied; “But I am on the Rock. I do not experience those transports which some have expressed in the view of death; but my dependence is on the mercy of God in Christ. Here my religion began, and here it must end.”

But now notice how the Psalmist brings his cry to the Lord expressing not only this great and immediate resolve going to the *Lord my Rock*. But this desire to be heard and answered: “Do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.” One of the differences between mere external formal prayer and the pouring out of the heart to the Lord in earnest prayer is at this very point. The child of God desires to have answers. They desire a return from the God of heaven. They are not satisfied with only the calming of the mind and subduing of the will in the act of prayer, but they long to have an answer from the Lord as soon as possible! I am not speaking of some audible voice or anything of that nature. Nor does this infer some kind of lack of faith - though it can - for when we do not see the Lord move or act it brings with it deadness of soul and the temptation to doubt because to be without God who answers prayer would be as those under the curse of the grave and hell. So what are we to do? Pray against this evil, this temptation: *Do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.*

We also are persistent and earnest in prayer. You remember our Lord's illustration of the neighbor who knocks on his friend's door at midnight to borrow some bread for a late arriving guest: Lk. 11:8, "I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you....If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" Samuel Rutherford in the *Trial & Triumph of Faith* which is his exposition of the Lord's dealing with the Syro-Phoenician woman: "It is said, "He answered not a word," but it is not said, "He *heard* not a word." These two differ very much. Christ often hears when He does not answer -- His *not* answering *is an answer*, and speaks thus: 'Pray on, go on and cry, for the Lord holds His door fast bolted, not to keep you out, but that you may knock, and knock, and it shall be opened.'" So we learn to be persistent and earnest in prayer and to cry out: *Do not be silent. Hear me O Lord!*

The language of the Psalmist is that of assurance: "When I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary." The *Holy Sanctuary* is a reference to the Holy of Holies in the back of tabernacle/temple where the mercy seat and ark of the covenant was located. It was from there that God spoke and answered. Heb. 9:24, shows us that this is not 'spiritualizing' but reality: "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Where do we direct our prayers? Our Lord is clear in Jn. 4, that it is not toward Jerusalem. Where is that place that God meets man? Is it not in Christ who is both God and man, by Whom God tabernacles with us, Whose blood of atonement covers our sins and satisfies God, that we may approach Him? So when we come face to face with the realization of all our unworthiness before God and our circumstances press upon us, and we begin to sink, what strengthens faith, what encourages us in prayer as we cry out to the Lord? What answers all the objections of our consciences and what troubles we see with our eyes, that we can expect a good answer from our God? Where is assurance to be found? We look to Christ who has gone for us behind the veil. As John Trapp wrote, "Toward this (a type of Christ, the Word essential), David lifted up his hands, that it might be as a ladder, whereby his prayer might get up to heaven." As we face the long distance endurance race of faith, Heb. 12:2, "Looking unto {αφορῶντες NomPlPresPtc to view with undivided attention by looking away from every other object; to regard fixedly & earnestly} Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..." Let us as the Psalmist fix our eyes on Jesus, who as our Intercessor looks upon us, listens to us, feels for us and is prepared to answer us. Phil. 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

II. Praying for Deliverance

Ps. 28:3, "Do not take me away with the wicked and with the workers of iniquity, who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts."

Even the child of God sins. There is still corruption in the godly. But that does not mean they are "the wicked" and "the workers of iniquity." Think with me: When we face trials, when we do not have an answer from the Lord immediately. Then before the Lord we guard our hearts and enforce our trusting in the Lord so as to not be led astray into wrong paths by disapproving and disavowing the ways of the wicked. The Psalmist particularly notes the kind of people which we would call *back-stabbers*. That is they "speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts." As Christians we are those who love our neighbors which means we desire the highest and best for them as revealed in God's Word. We are honest and forthright. That does NOT mean that we are blunt and coarse and rude. Rather, Col. 4:5,6, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." Eph. 4:15, "But, speaking the truth in love..."

How do we pray that we would not be taken away with the wicked and with workers of iniquity? We pray that we would not be captured by their slick and deceptive speech In our day it seems that flattery and appealing to the emotions will get you everywhere. The child of God prays, *Lord, do not allow me to be drawn away and ruined by their flattering speech and lies and plots. They say they are for me, but they really seek to destroy me. O Lord protect and keep me. We pray that we would not catch their contagious sins to do as they do. Instead of hearing their enticing arguments and adopting their lifestyle, let me rather follow after Christ and His truth. As an obedient member of your flock lead me and may I follow all the days of my life. Don't leave me to myself lest I follow after them.* My friends, there are those times when the goats are so loud that the sheep seem to have trouble discerning the voice of Christ! MH, "Let no even of Providence be an invincible temptation to me, to draw me either into the imitation or into the interest of wicked people." Grace makes the Christian careful about the dangers of being drawn aside by evil men so we have this prayer of David which attitude and prayer we should emulate. We pray also that we would be saved from being involved in their condemnation and penalty. We do not often think of the connection that wicked and the workers of iniquity are facing the condemnation and penalty from God. But here the Psalmist prays *Let me not be led into the condemnation of the wicked because I am not one of those that speak peace while seeking the destruction of others.* Simply put: If you are careful not to do what sinners do, then you will have reason to hope that you will not have the same end as they. II Cor. 6:14f, "...What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?...Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Therefore,

having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

III. May the child of God pray against his enemies?

This is a section which is imprecatory, that is a prayer that God would punish the enemy. Ps. 28:4,5, “Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors; Give them according to the work of their hands; Render to them what they deserve.” Some simply and only dismiss this as inconsistent with Christianity, but rather we should be understood in a biblical way. The Psalmist simply agrees with God who is clear about His just judgments against such wickedness. This is not a prayer which arises out of a spirit of private revenge: *I don't like them so go get 'em God!!* It is not a prayer raised against our own private enemies or simply because something which was done to us. It does not rise out of hatred of their persons. Nor should such prayers be used against everyone who opposes God. They are prayers brought against the enemies of God - hence sometimes called *War songs of the Prince of Peace* because there are any number of warnings against standing against Christ, His kingdom, His Word, His people. Further such prayers really ought to be general -- in that we acknowledge that we may be mistaken about an individual. Yet the very fact that such denunciations, such prayers of imprecation, are found on the pages of Holy Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit, is a very severe warning against secure and stubborn sinners. We ought to remember that Spirit indicts prayer for He brings from Christ and puts such petitions into the mouth of the Church to raise before her Head and King.

Let me point you to Calvin's wise explanation p. 469: “...it is unquestionable, that if the flesh move us to seek revenge, the desire is wicked in the sight of God. He not only forbids us to imprecate evil upon our enemies in revenge for private injuries, but it cannot be otherwise than that all those desires which spring from hatred must be disordered. David's example, therefore must not be alleged by those who are driven by their own intemperate passion to seek vengeance. The holy prophet is not inflamed here by his own private sorrow to devote his enemies to destruction; but laying aside the desire of the flesh, he gives judgment concerning the matter itself. Before a man can, therefore, denounce vengeance against the wicked, he must first shake himself free from all improper feelings in his own mind. In the second place prudence must be exercised, that the heinousness of the evils which offend us drive us not to intemperate zeal, which happened even to Christ's disciples, when they desired that fire might be brought from heaven to consume those who refused to entertain their Master (Lk. 9:54). They pretended, it is true, to act according to the example of Elijah, but Christ severely rebuked them, and told them that they knew not by what spirit they were actuated. In particular, we must observe this general rule, that we cordially desire and labor for the welfare of the whole human race. Thus it will come to pass, that we shall not only give way to the exercise of God's mercy, but shall also which the conversion of those who seem obstinately to rush upon their own

destruction. In short, David, being free from every evil passion, and likewise endowed with the spirit of discretion and judgment, pleads here not so much his own cause as the cause of God. And by this prayer, he farther reminds both himself and the faithful, that although the wicked may give themselves loose reins in the commission of every species of vice with impunity for a time, they must at length stand before the judgment-seat of God.”

This certainly means that everyone should take such Words of Scripture to heart. God shows by His Word and also by His works of Providence in favor of the godly and against their enemies whose side He approves. When these things come to pass in His providence according to His revealed mind in the Scriptures it must be taken to heart. It is a warning beforehand of what is to come. “Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, He shall destroy them and not build them up.” In many places throughout the Scriptures and history God has evidently made this clear: The Egyptians killed the Hebrew male children and what happened to their firstborn sons? Ps. 83/Judges 4, Sisera would have destroyed Israel with his iron chariots, but was himself killed with an iron spike. Daniel’s accusers were thrown into the same lion’s den which they had intended to be the end of Daniel. Cardinal Beaton condemned the Scots reformer George Wishart to the stake and watched him die out his palace window, the same window from which he was displayed after being killed.

So we should take it to heart that God’s nature is invariably set against sin. He would have to deny Himself not to be opposed to and punish sin. Let us turn from every unholy and God-provoking way. Let us thank Christ who bore that fearful burden of our sin and its punishment that we might be delivered and reconciled to God..... AMEN.

IV. How to make good use of God’s answer to prayer