

Prayers

To God

Weekly theme: the glory of God

Imagine the glory of God in the inner courtyards of the Temple, where the Ark of the Covenant is a simple gold box containing the Word of God, protected by vast cherubim spreading their wings over the holy presence of God.

Now imagine the glory of God in the body of Christ on the Cross, and the heavenly chorus of praise rising over Him as He is risen from the tomb! He is the Word of God Incarnate, risen and ascended in glory!

For myself

I thank You, Lord Jesus, for the gentle way you deal with me when I am struggling. I do not understand what happens to me when I become troubled by events. Sometimes I am fine about everything, and then it is as if some trigger has been pulled inside me and I find myself doing what I should not. Change my heart, Lord Jesus, change my soul, and change my spirit. Be the Master of my reactions, so that I know myself and may have confidence both that I am a child of God, and that I behave like one. Thanks You, Lord Jesus. AMEN

For others

Pray for people who struggle to survive in island communities exploited for their maritime or mineral wealth. Pray for all who work to bring justice to small nations who are prey to the greed of international industrial bullies.

Meditation

In the Kingdom of God, greatness is found in little things;

A seed sown in the soil,
Yeast growing inside the dough,
A child singing praise in a crowd,
The return of a wayward son,
A small coin offered to God's work,
Some water at a wedding feast.

Yet in His providence, little things grow into bigger things;

A sinner saved by faith,
The wonder of a body healed

A child raised from the dead,
The victory of love over every evil
A frightening storm calmed,
Sight restored in one who was blind

So in your life, what small things will become great for God?

Bible Passage

Psalm 28

Of David.

- 1 To You I call, O LORD my Rock;
do not be deaf to me.
For if You remain silent,
I will be like those who have gone down to the pit.
- 2 Hear my cry for help as I call out to You,
and as I lift up my hands towards Your Holiest Place.
- 3 Do not drag me away with the wicked,
with those who do evil,
who speak peaceably with their neighbours
while evil is in their hearts.
- 4 Repay them for their deeds
and for the evil they have done;
repay them for the work their hands have done
and give them what they deserve.
- 5 For they do not understand the works of the LORD
or what His hands have done;
He will tear them down
and never rebuild them.
- 6 Blessed be the LORD,
for He has heard my cry for help.
- 7 The LORD is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in Him;
I am helped, so my heart rejoices
and I will give thanks to him in song.
- 8 The LORD is the strength of His people,
a place of safety and salvation for His Anointed.
- 9 Save Your people and bless Your heritage;
be their shepherd and sustain them for ever.

Review

This psalm is a cry from the heart. Its words are those of a worshipper calling out to the Lord with heartfelt sincerity, asking the Lord to hear his prayer (28:1); and as he does so, he lifts his hands in prayer towards the holiest part of the Temple, the 'Holy of Holies' which was the

dwelling place of God Himself (28:2). Clearly, he was deeply upset by something that was happening. It affected him personally, and he was affronted by the evil that had been perpetrated not just against himself but also others whom he knew (28:3-5), and he felt aggrieved and at a loss to understand why God's people should be treated in this way.

Yet as reflected in this psalm, the faith of David in Almighty God remained utterly firm, for he believed that the Lord was a God of justice, who would ultimately judge all things (28:4,5). His confidence in the Lord was complete, and he was able to sing praises to the Lord even though the situation he was praying about was one that gave him great distress (28:6,7), and the final two verses of the psalm are full of rejoicing in the Lord because of the salvation and sustenance of His people.

Psalms 28 has been used throughout the centuries as an affirmation of the saving power of God, and the great hymn of thanksgiving, the 'Te Deum' uses the last verse '*save Your people and bless Your heritage ...*' (28:9). One intriguing possibility has been suggested, which is the theory that this psalm was used by our Lord when He prayed in the garden at Gethsemane. In Jesus' day it was common for people to use the Psalms as 'models' for prayer. This means that the psalm was recited and the person praying would find in the general sentiments of the psalm the specific issues that were of concern to them.

Now, if we think of what Jesus was going through on the night of His betrayal, then much of this psalm does indeed come alive. Jesus struggled with the will of God which meant that He would indeed die (28:1) yet He persisted in absolute faith before the Father (28:2). His whole earthly life had been a battle against 'the wicked' (28:3-5) and he had Himself prophesied the 'tearing down' of the Temple (28:5 - Matt 24:1,2). At the end, He stood and faced His accuser with a peace that could only come from one who was at peace with God, just as David did in the last few verses of this psalm. He knew that the end of His path was victory, for He was the Lords 'Anointed' (28:8), and His death would bring to fruition God's saving plan for all the world (28:9 - Matt 27, 28:19f.)

Whether we are right or not about this use of the psalm, these ideas should not stop us using it ourselves as a passage of Scripture which goes to the very heart of our faith. If we read it with this in mind then there are many features of blessing. The psalm reminds us that we can call upon the Lord as a '*Rock*' (28:1) who will never be moved despite the problems and evils of this world. Furthermore, He is always willing to hear us when we call out to Him, even in the midst of our despair (28:2).

It is surely true that just like David and the people of Olds Testament times, and just like Jesus in His day, we all face evil. Even though David fought Israel's enemies and defeated them, and Jesus has won a victory over Satan that seals his end, evil is still prevalent until the final day when it will be destroyed by God (Rev 20). He face evil and the works of the enemy daily, so by speaking about it and praying about it (28:3-5) we expose it. In this way we can limit its power to be deceptive and destructive of relationships, and to bring trouble and distress. By facing up to the powers of evil together with David and with our Lord, we take part in our Almighty God's great and final work of destroying the power of evil in this world and bring it to nothing!

In the sure knowledge that this is the purpose of God, we can then rejoice with the psalmist (28:6f.). For despite the trouble and difficulties we each experience, evil and perilous situations can indeed be turned into tests from which we can learn the power of God's eternal salvation, and what this really means most to us. We know that the Lord is our 'shepherd' (28:9, see 23:1) and His love for us never fails. Thanks be to God.

Discipleship

Application

Dealing with evil

Some find it hard to deal with the idea of evil. Why should God allow it, and why does it exist? Why did not God make the world a better place? But these questions simply do not address the reality of life, and they are entirely abstract, and to answer them in a way that is not connected with reality is disingenuous. The truth is that evil exists and we must all face it. In the last few days I have spoken to people who have felt the pain of terrible evil in family life, in death, in injustice and the twists and turns of life which sometime defy belief. I will not say to such dear folks that evil is a figment of anyone's imagination, or an intellectual problem to be resolved by analysing human behaviour. Such people need to know they are loved by the one and only God who can deal with evil, and who has shown this through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ!

Psalm 28 was written centuries before Jesus faced evil on the Cross, but it speaks of the same battles we face each day with an enemy who tries to detach us from truth, from faith, from fulfilment in life, and from personal happiness. It tells us however that if we allow the Lord our God to remain at the centre of our lives then we, with Him, will be victorious.

Ideas for what to do

- Explore other passages of Scripture in which God is likened to a 'rock', such as Genesis 49:24, Exodus 33:21,22, Deuteronomy 32:12-18, 1 Samuel 2:2 etc.
- Write down a list of what it means for you to speak of Jesus as your 'shepherd'. If it is a short list, then this may be helpful because it will be easy to remember. If it is a long list then you are blessed with many inspirations through which the Lord can reveal His love for you.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you find it possible to see the experience of Jesus within this psalm?
2. Verse 2 describes an attitude of worship in which hands are 'lifted up'. Do you find it helpful to lift your hands in worship? Why is this so, or not so?
3. Discuss who is meant by 'His Anointed' in verse 8 of this psalm.

Final Prayer

God of grace, may we always praise You in spirit and in truth. We are not worthy of all You have done for us, and yet we can still come before You to fight against evil and seek Your ways to find justice and peace within our world now. Give us grace to give our lives for what is right; AMEN