

When God Comes To The Rescue

Psalm 140

Introduction: It would not be difficult at all to see the Lord Jesus praying this song of David on the night of His betrayal and the beginning of His passion. A psalm of lament, its writer is, as Allen Ross says, “being wrongly accused of something serious by malicious slanderers bent on ruining him” (*Psalms*, vol. 3, 840). This was true of King David in the past. It would be true of King Jesus in the future (Matt. 26:59-61). It may also be our experience as well as those who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12). When “evil men” (v. 1), “violent men” (v. 1), those “who plan evil in their hearts” (v. 2) come after us both in action and word, what is our proper response? Psalm 140 provides for us 4 biblical truths to claim and hang on to in these trying times.

I. We can call on God to save us 140:1-5

When we are pursued and persecuted by evil, violent, and wicked men, our first impulse should not be to defend ourselves. Our first response should be to pray, and pray to the Lord we know personally and intimately. David refers to his personal, covenant-keeping God, “the LORD” (*Yahweh*), seven time in Psalm 140. To this God he cries out, “Rescue me” (v. 1), “Keep me safe” (vs 1, 4) “Protect (*ESV*, “guard”) me” (v. 4). And, from whom does David need to be saved and rescued? It is “evil and violent men” (v. 1), men

who “plan evil in their hearts” and “stir up wars all day long” (v. 2; cf. Jam 4:1-3). Furthermore, what is their primary attack weapon? Their tongue (cf. Jam. 3:5-12)! In very powerful imagery David says their tongues are “as sharp as a snake’s bite; viper’s venom is under their lips. *Selah.*” Think about that. Because his enemies are so skilled in verbal warfare, David again pleads to the Lord to “protect me” (v. 4). These wicked and violent and proud (*ESV*, “arrogant”) men, who are powerful and persuasive, “plan to make me stumble.” They want to “trap me with hidden ropes” (v. 5). They “spread a net along the path and set snares for me” (v. 5). These soldiers of Satan want nothing good for me, only evil and my downfall. Michael Wilcox notes that, “in Romans 3:13, Paul quotes verse 3, the poison of vipers is on their lips...to help show that evils of this kind are endemic to human nature” (*The Message of Psalms 73-150*, BST, 263). Evil men are often very smart and intelligent. They are skilled orators who are very good at verbal combat. They are good at setting traps with their words. Too often they are far superior to us in this warfare. However, they are weaklings in comparison to our God! What is my best weapon against them? Prayer! Who needs to fight this battle? My Lord, “the captain of my salvation” (Heb. 2:10, *KJV*). *Selah!* Think and meditate on that wonderful truth when you are wrongly and maliciously attacked for your devotion to the Lord Jesus.

II. We can trust that God will hear our cries

140:6-8

Verses 6-8 are extremely personal as David references *Yahweh* (LORD) no less than 4 times. Through a continuation of the prayer of verses 1-5, it begins with a short and concise declaration of faith, “I say to the LORD (*Yahweh*), You are my God” (*Eli*, a shortened form of *Elohim*). The LORD is my God, and because of that foundational truth I can cry out, “Listen, LORD, to my cry for help (ESV, “My pleas for mercy”). Verse 7 conveys the confidence the Psalmist has in the LORD his God. “LORD (*Yahweh*), my Lord (*Adonai*), my strong Savior, you shield my head on the day of battle.” As my strong deliverer, my saving strength, you shield and protect me like a sturdy helmet. As my divine warrior and guard, I know I will be saved when the battle comes. Spurgeon says it beautifully, “The shield of the Eternal is better protection than a helmet of brass. When arrow fly thick and the battle-axe crashes right and left, there is no covering for the head like the power of the Almighty” (*TOD*, vol. 3 296). Confident in the truth that the LORD will advance his righteous cause, David concludes the second movement of this psalm in verse 8 praying, “LORD, do not grant the desires of the wicked, do not let them achieve their goals” (ESV, “further their evil plot”). Otherwise, they will become proud. *Selah*. Lord, mess them up so that they do not

become more arrogant and puffed up than they already are. Warren Wiersbe wisely writes “Our prayers for godless people must focus on changing their character, and not just stopping their persecution of believers” (*The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry*, 388).

III. We can ask God to judge the wicked 140:9-11

Verses 9-11 fall into the category of an imprecatory prayer or psalm. David asks God to judge them for their evil against him. To put it in contemporary language, “These men must have their deserts, and taste their own medicine” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, TOTC, 469). Some find these types of prayers inconsistent with Jesus telling us to pray for our enemies in Matthew 5:44. However, several things should be noted in considering this apparent difficulty. First and most importantly, David commits the matter completely to the Lord. He does not take things into his own hands. Second, mercy and justice always go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. Third, these types of Psalms foreshadow the end time, eschatological judgment of God Himself (see Rev. 20:11-15). Finally, our Lord Himself pronounced in very harsh language woes of judgment on the evil men of His day (see Matt. 23). Interestingly, these imprecatory prayers are almost always in the Psalms. Thus, the issues of poetic language, use of hyperbole, etc., also should guide our careful reading of these verses.

David asks the Lord to deal with his adversaries and persecutors when they surround him (v. 9). To be precise, when they attack him with their words, turn their words back on them. “May the trouble their lips cause (cf. v 3) overwhelm them.” Verse 10 definitely has eschatological and final judgment in view. In language that recalls the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Gen. 19), David asks God to “let hot coals fall on them.” In language that anticipates eternal judgment for those who reject God and the salvation He offers in Jesus, David prays, “Let them be thrown into the fire, into the abyss, never again to rise” (v. 10, cf. Rev. 14:9-11; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8). This is David’s way of saying, “Lord, stop what these evil and wicked men say and do now and forever.” Calvin observes at this point, “David cuts off the reprobate from the hope of pardon, as knowing them to be beyond recovery. Had they been disposable to repentance, he would have been inclinable on his part to mercy” (*Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. VI, Psalms 93-150*, 231). Verse 11 concludes the section asking the Lord to remove these wicked persons and their influence.” Do not let a slanderer stay in the land.” Send them away! Let them be hunted by the evil with which they have hunted us.” Let evil relentlessly (*ESV*, “speedily”) hunt down a violent man.” It is sobering to think these verses describe all who are separated from Christ. It once described each of us in our unredeemed and unrepentant state. We may rightly

ask God to judge the wicked, but we would be wise to examine our own lives before we do!

IV. We can know that God will defend the righteous who are hurting

140:12-13

Verses 12-13 move away from judgment on the wicked to hope for the hurting (v. 12) and the righteous (v. 13). Four words highlight the contrast between God's people and the wicked of verses 1-11: 1) poor, 2) needy, 3) righteous and 4) upright. The psalmist is confident ("I know") that "the LORD" will defend the cause of those who have been unjustly treated by wicked and evil men. Ross notes that David applies legal terms to what the Lord will do for those who are his (p. 848). The LORD will "uphold the just cause of the poor." He will provide "justice for the needy" (v. 12). Evil, violent and wicked men may abuse, hound, and mistreat God's people, especially with their words. We will not, we must not, return evil for evil. Remain silent. Commit the matter to the LORD. He will defend you. The psalm that began with a cry of desperation ends on a note of praise and confidence. In the end our God will make all things right (see Gen. 18:25). Justice will prevail. Therefore, those who trust in this God as their Lord ("the righteous" and "upright") "will praise your name" and they will "live in your presence." They will joyfully sing of who you are and what you have done

for them. They will live forever in your presence enjoying safety and security. These wonderful truths do not make the difficulties and trials of this life easy. They do, however, give us the faith and strength to endure them.

Conclusion

The song “Have Faith in God” could have been written as a response or reflection on Psalm 140. The 3rd stanza seems to be most appropriate to these 13 verses. For those who have fled to Jesus for salvation, no matter what they may endure in this life, they provide a wonderful reminder of how great is His care for His children.

“Have faith in God in your pain and your sorrow;
His heart is touched with your grief and despair.
Cast all your cares and your burdens upon Him;
And leave them there, oh, leave them there.
Have faith in God, He’s on His throne;
Have faith in God, He watches o’er His own.
He cannot fail, He must prevail;
Have faith in God, Have faith in God.”