

Psalm 31

Introduction – “*Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward*” (Job 5:7). This is a Psalm about trouble and so it is a psalm easily applied to all of us for all of us have many troubles. Even though we acknowledge this truth, troubles, when they come, often hit us unexpectedly and sideways. The psalmist (David) is in trouble; Christ quoted this psalm while hanging on the cross; we are explicitly exhorted to apply this psalm to our troubles as well (vv23-24). This psalm moves back and forth between the experience of desperate anguish and the gift of great confidence in Yahweh to protect and save – just like our own life experiences.

For Your Name’s Sake (vv1-5) – David declares his trust in God and his trust that God will not let him down. He pleads to be delivered (v1) and speedily (v2). He prays that God would *be* his rock while declaring that God *is* his rock (vv2-3). He asks for God to help “*for Your name’s sake*” just as Moses did, pleading for Israel to be spared. In v5, we have the words that Jesus prayed from the cross (Luke 23:46), mindful of the full context of Psalm 31. Jesus was asking the God of truth to pull Him from the net which Judas and the Jews had secretly laid.

So, did God answer that prayer? After saying these things, Jesus breathed His last – and died. We know now that the story was not over. We know now that God did vindicate Jesus and in doing so God was vindicated as well. And so we learn that God does vindicate and deliver His people, but not in a mechanical way. He often works through what looks like catastrophes and He often answers at the very last moment – and even beyond what we think is the very last moment. Listen to David pray. Listen to Jesus pray. Learn to imitate their prayers – filled with contentment but not stoicism, arguing with God, pleading with an omniscient and omnipotent God to be so in this particular and personal situation.

Biblical Trust and Biblical Hate (vv6-8) – The Psalm-singer declares his strong trust in Yahweh Who knows him personally, knows his particular trouble, and knows the state of his soul in the adversity. He knows and trusts God so surely because he hates any regard for vain idols (v6 – “*vain things of falsehood*”). Biblical trust grows as we cultivate biblical hatred for useless falsehoods that we make into idols – often the “pop” fortresses of our culture (wealth, health, diet, family relationships, mysticism, psychology-ism, political activism...). These are not our fortresses; these are not our Savior.

And when we have committed ourselves to the Lord believing that He has set our feet “*in a wide place*,” it often does not look like it (consider Christ on the cross). Suffering is not a sign of not being in the Lord’s care; suffering *without hope* is a sign of not being in the Lord’s care.

Anguished Cries for Help (vv9-13) – Having this hope does not take away the troubles nor does it mean that we are always exultant. We are in the midst of a story, our story, and that means we can be rejoicing in one chapter and despairing in the next. Listen to this whole section and consider them in light of Jesus hanging on the cross: He cannot wipe His eyes, His soul, His body, His very life is spent (vv9-10). When David, or Jesus, or you, are down and out, ridiculed or slandered by others – where are your fair-weather friends? There is only One place, One Person to whom we can turn.

My Times are in Your Hands (vv14-18) – The Psalm-singer returns to His God with great trust and calls on Him to action. God is “*my God*” and confidence grows because “*my times are in Your hand*.” He prays for God’s face to shine upon Him and for His mercies’ sake (again, to the glory of God). God’s servant is not to be ashamed; instead the wicked are as they are shut up in the grave and put to silence.

God’s Unwavering Kindness (vv19-22) – Praise is built on this foundation of trust. Praise must burst forth when one has this foundation of trust in the LORD in the midst of troubles. God wants you to trust Him in the presence of others: “God will deliver us! God will be kind to us! God will show His mercy upon us! God will vindicate us!” These are to be declared out loud. God’s ways are inscrutable and so the hows and whens of such deliverances cannot be predicted. But they will come. And when things look their worst we must not fall to the temptation to say in haste, “*I am cut off from before Your eyes*.” But even when we falter in our faith, God does not falter in His faithfulness, “*Nevertheless, You heard the voice of my supplications*” (v22).

Explicit Application (vv23-24) – We know that we are to apply the Psalms to ourselves, but in these verses we are told explicitly so. We are to “*love the LORD*” out of that trust. We are to love Him because He preserves the faithful and repays the proud. We are to be of good courage and in that, we will be strengthened with courage. The exercise of faith, of hope, of love, of courage brings more of the same. Learn to pray and sing and trust like David. Learn to pray and sing and trust like Jesus. Sing the Psalms.