

Psalm 41

Introduction – As we dive into the Psalms again, remember that they are to be sung historically (considering the context of David's life), typologically (seeing their fulfillment in the life of Jesus), and personally (applying them in our own day individually or upon the church corporately). Jesus Christ is the great Psalm-singer, and we should hear His voice singing as His body sings (Psalm 22:22, Heb 2:12).

The great theme of this Psalm is the mercy of God for those in His covenant juxtaposed to the betrayal of covenant members like Judas Iscariot. Jesus had been singing this Psalm long before selecting Judas to be a friend in whom He trusted.

Outline and Summary of the Psalm – I take the outline of this chiasmic Psalm as follows:

- A – Affirmation of God's Blessings (vv1-3)
- B – Prayer for Mercy because of Sin (v4)
- C – The Words of the Enemies and Covenant Traitors (vv5-9)
- B' – Prayer for Mercy because of Oppression (v10)
- A – Confidence in God's Blessings (vv11-12)

Verse 13 functions as the conclusion to the first book of the five books of the psalms. While it is not easy to determine exactly how and when these were put together in these volumes, in this first book, David is the only named author. These were David's psalms, and they begin and end with "blessed" (1:1, 41:1, 13). *"Blessed be the LORD God of Israel..."* Yahweh is His covenant name and Israel is His covenant people. Remember, the true sons of Abraham (Israel was technically his grandson) are those who have the faith of Abraham (Gal 3:7-9). We are the covenant people of God and these are our songs.

Verses 1-3 are proverbial and didactic, but they also hint at the occasion of the psalm. David is sick, possibly unto death, and his enemies are closing in, watching and conniving. David knows the character of God though; He will be merciful to those who show mercy, delivering them, preserving them, blessing them, strengthening them. And here already, we see Jesus. *"The promise is not that the generous saint shall have no trouble, but that he shall be preserved in it, and in due time brought out of it. How true was this of our Lord. Never trouble deeper nor triumph brighter than his"* – Spurgeon. Verses 4 and 10 are the specific supplications brought to the Lord in this situation. It is a cry for mercy, healing of the soul, and healing unto victory over the enemies. His soul needs healing because he has sinned (v4), and his circumstances need deliverance because of his enemies (v10). They "whisper" (where we get our word conspiracy), devising his hurt (v7). An evil, perverse, slanderous word or matter has befallen him, they say, and it will be his demise (v8). The traitors even include his closest companions (literally the word meaning "to eat bread together") and for David this may refer to Ahithophel and Absalom (v9). Verses 11-12 end the psalm standing on the promises of God. Consider how we can sing these verses historically, typologically, and personally.

A Psalm About Mercy – Mercy is not just something God does, it is who God is – *"And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving the iniquity and transgression and sin...'"* (Exod 34:6-7, Deut 7:9-11). His tender mercies are over all His works (Psalm 145:9). Thomas Watson defines this mercy as *"...a melting disposition whereby we lay to heart the miseries of others and are ready to be instrumental for their good."* Because it is His character, God is merciful to those who are merciful to others, which is the point in vv1-3. This is not vending-machine theology, but it is a promise that God's world is a world of causation. Those who *"consider the poor"* (the helpless and powerless, not necessarily nor simply the financially poor – v1) are sowing in a world where there will be reaping. The psalmist understands mercy because he has become like his heavenly Father; he is a merciful man, and so he can confidently call upon the Lord to be merciful to him (*"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"* – Matt 5:7). Those who do not understand or believe how merciful God is will be miserly, they will think of themselves first, they will be overly protective and defensive. Because they do not believe God is merciful, they will not be merciful. They will try to prove to God that they have earned and deserve His favor, rather than simply praying, *"God be merciful to me, a sinner"* (Luke 18:13), just as the psalmist did (v4). We are instructed as well, *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb 4:16).

Covenant Keepers and Traitors – This psalm is about and addressed to our covenant LORD (Yahweh is God's covenant name, v1, 2, 3, 4, 10). In addition, this psalm is addressing the covenant traitor, Judas Iscariot (v9, Matt 26:49-50, John 13:18-30, Acts 1:16-17). He, along with Christ's enemies, whispered and plotted how they might destroy Jesus (v7, Mark 3:6, John 11:53). They enflamed the crowd with words of slander and lies until the crowd cried out "Crucify Him, crucify Him" (v8). What David records happened to him, but it was also a prophecy of what would later happen and be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But there is even more.

If that part of the psalm points to Jesus and He could sing them as His, could He also sing and pray verse 4 and following, *"LORD, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You"*? Actually, yes, for we have here the compassionate assumption of our sinful condition by our Savior who took our sin upon Himself (2 Cor 5:21, fulfilling Isaiah 53:4-5). It also means that verse 10 points to Christ's resurrection and vindication of His name over the enemies of that generation, particularly in 70AD. This means as we read, pray, sing this Psalm, we are to reflect on it as the voice of Jesus taking upon Himself our rejection of Him, our transgressions imputed to Him, and Christ's full atonement for those sins. It means we are to hear Christ's vindication in our salvation, for His death was not in vain; God sent His Son that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17).

The Perfect Covenant Head and Father's Day – This psalm sings of God's mercy. It sings of the power of being in His covenant, blessing for those who keep covenant, and curses for those who do not. And we see the covenantal power of the head of a covenant faithfully taking responsibility for those under his care. Here's another application.

Look around our country and see the violent curse that comes upon familial fatherlessness. Absent fathers, abortive fathers, abusive fathers, and neglectful fathers all are symptoms of the greatest sin – fathers who will not take covenantal responsibility.

Husbands and fathers (and all men who must learn this from Jesus), taking responsibility for those under your headship is the key to covenantal blessing for you and all under your charge. Look to Jesus as the example. He did not finger-point at the children. He did not complain about the sins of His bride. He took them upon Himself as His responsibility and spoke to the Father. His people had sinned against the Father and He stood before God as though it was His own sin – because covenantally it was. We think that is not fair, and of course it is not fair. Look at Jesus hanging on the cross. Was that fair? But we do not understand the immeasurable mercy that is ours and for our people if we will but follow Jesus, imitating His covenant headship. We are not called to atone for the sins of our people, but we are called to take responsibility for their sins before the Father in the name of the great Atoner. Husbands and fathers who learn this will find that their people run to them in their distress rather than run from them. They will know that they have you for an advocate, a little "s" savior, and they will follow you in your faith. *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* will hang over your home.

When Jesus did this act of mercy, what happened? What happens to those in this New Covenant who turn in faith to the One who died for them? Learn the power of covenant. Learn the promise of covenant. Learn the mercy of this covenant – and live it out – for it is yours – for you and your family. You and your family will sing, *"By this I know that You are well pleased with me, because my enemy does not triumph over me. As for me, You uphold me in my integrity, and set me before Your face forever"* (vv11-12).

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