

Betrayal: "A Close Friend in Whom I Trusted"

In this series of articles we're looking at Psalm 41, a Psalm written by David. This is an important text for a number of reasons, but especially as it teaches us that God blesses those who *rightly* seek to help those—both physically and spiritually—who are experiencing weakness, oppression and even helplessness. We may need a helping hand in a number of ways. The scriptures teach us that we're not body only, but we're body and soul, therefore, there's always a *spiritual* component to every problem we face in life. That being true, an important part of any help we give others, over time, must include seeking to discover the deeper issues that someone is facing, not merely dealing with the immediate externals only. It may be that David wrote this Psalm connected to the time that his son, Absalom, was intent on taking the throne away from him.

As we look back at the text of Psalm 41, in verse 9 we read: "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." The Hebrew phrase, "lifted up his heel" speaks of "scheming and deception" against another person. In the context this may be referring to an incident that takes place in 2 Samuel. A man by the name of Ahithophel was a trusted counselor and David relied on him. In 2 Samuel 16:23 we read: "Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom." Ahithophel switched sides and betrayed David his rightful king. This section of Psalm 41 ends with David's prayer: "But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up, *that I may repay them!*" David was the king in Israel and, as king, has every right, before God, to punish betrayers. And yet, it's also true that the implication of what David is saying goes along these lines, "God, *if they don't repent*, may they, *ultimately*, receive your righteous judgment." We've seen David crying out to God for mercy let's look now at David expressing confidence in God.

In verse 11 we read: "By this I know that *you delight in me...*" David goes on to express confidence that, "my enemy will not shout in triumph over me." David is confident—not in himself—but in God. God is faithful and he keeps his promises. David has, himself, cared for the poor and downcast. One example would be his kindness toward Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9:7. Verse 12 speaks of David's integrity. David is not claiming perfection but he knows that his *pattern of life* toward God is as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). David's prayer is that he will, ultimately, be healed from his sickness and sorrow and freed from the wickedness of his enemies and unfaithful friends. God cares for his covenant children who are poor, oppressed and needy in a way that David could never have done.

Earlier, in verse 9, we read of David's "close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread and has lifted his heel against me." As we look across redemptive history, we learn that this phrase points forward to great David's greater Son, the perfect King to come. We see this phrase, spoken by Jesus, in John 13:18. The night that Jesus shared the final Passover with his disciples before his crucifixion, he gives them an example of humble service as well as an example of considering those who are in need. Jesus ties a towel around his waist and washes his disciples' (including Judas') feet. At that time in first century Israel this task was, ordinarily, the responsibility of the lowliest household servant. Jesus speaks of the blessing of those who serve others in his name. He then goes on to say that the promised blessings are not for everyone. "I am not speaking of *all of you*; I know whom I have chosen. But let the scripture be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted up his heel against me.' I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he." Jesus was betrayed by Judas, one of his own disciples, although clearly not a *genuine* disciple from the heart. Jesus suffered more than David could have ever suffered. King David was only a type of the true King who would come and give his life for the "poor in spirit." (Matt. 5:3) The wrath that Christians deserve for our sins was poured out on Jesus at Calvary. Jesus is the *perfect example* of considering the poor, the oppressed, the weak and brokenhearted.

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