

Our Refuge in Time of Need

In this short series of articles, we're looking at Psalm 142. I pray that these articles will provide biblical encouragement as you struggle with the difficult times that we're all experiencing under the threat of Covid 19. We're unpacking the Psalm under three main divisions. In my previous article, "Care for the Weary Soul," we looked at verses 1-2 under the heading, "Desperation: A Plea for Mercy." In those verses we heard the desperate cry of David for mercy from God. David's prayer is connected to an incident in his life where he's hiding in a cave from King Saul and his armies. Following that we saw in verses 3-4, "Desertion: No One Cares for My Soul." In these verses David is expressing his belief that he's been deserted by everyone he holds dear including family, friends and allies. Uncertainty in life has a way of helping us to see the desperate need that we all have for God. I want to look now under our third division:

—Declaration: Please, God, Do This for Me

At the end of verse 4 we read, "...no refuge remains for me; no one cares for my soul." Interestingly, David goes from believing that he has no "refuge" to declaring that God is his "refuge." Look with me at verse 5: "I cry to you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'" Looking further in verses 6-7 we read: "Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! Bring me out of prison that I may give thanks to your name!" Notice the verbs in these verses: Attend, Deliver, Bring, give thanks. These Hebrew verbs given in these verses are "causative active" verbs. David is, in effect, crying out to God in this way: "Please, God, Do This for Me. Cause this to happen in my life. You are my refuge." There's no hope for a positive outcome if God doesn't cause it to happen.

I want to momentarily digress from our look at this Psalm to say that, sadly, many think of prayer as some type of "magic wand" that we wave and it causes God to positively act on our behalf regardless of how we're living our lives. Honest prayer, from Christians, assumes that we're seeking to commit our lives totally—albeit imperfectly—to God's word by his grace. His word teaches us that to be a Christian means that we're trusting in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. We're also taught to be regularly gathering in our local church under the preaching of the word, participating in the sacraments and corporate prayer as well as seeking to obey God and trust him regardless of our circumstances or whether our prayers are answered in the way we hoped. "...if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him." (John 9:31)

As Christians think of David's lonely situation, it should remind us of Jesus Christ. He was betrayed and turned over to the Roman authorities to be put to death. When he was on the cross—in a way that we can't completely understand—he was forsaken by his Father as is seen in this cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1; Mt. 27:46) As you're reading this article, do you feel alone? Do you believe that your family and friends have deserted you? Does it seem, at times, as if you don't have a friend in the world who will

genuinely care about you? We must remember that, for Christians, we're never truly alone no matter how we feel. Because Jesus was forsaken, Christians will never, ultimately, have to be. He's a friend that sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

In the last phrase of verse 7 David envisions the righteous gathered around him as he praises God for answered prayer. "The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me." We know from 1 Samuel 22:1-2 that God did answer David's prayer. "And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became captain over them. And there were with him about four hundred men." God answers the prayers of his people as only he can do. He alone knows perfectly what we need. We can be sure that God is our refuge in time of need no matter what we're facing. Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.