

George Philip Bible Readings

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The Book of Psalms.

The Psalter is a collection of poems intended for use in worship. The individual Psalms are the expressions of the attitudes and reactions of men in differing circumstances covering the whole sphere of human experience. They record the personal dealings of men with God, and God with men, and out of the depths of human conflict or victory, joy or sorrow, the Psalmist speaks his heart. But the emphasis is not finally on man at all. It is God first, last, and all the time, and for that reason the Psalms are good for our worship and good for our personal lives. They point us away to the One greater and surer than ourselves; to God, in every corner and every phase of human life. The Lord is a great God, in His hand are the deep places of the earth. O come let us worship and bow down, for He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture. (Ps.93)

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1

This is a Psalm of life's alternatives, and there are but two - the godly and the wicked. In spite of appearance's men are divided thus through all the Bible and all life. The man whose life is ordered and governed by the Law of God is a man whose life will be a living, fruitful thing. He will have a permanence drawn from God Himself; he shall not wither; his path shall be one of increasing ripeness and fruitfulness. The wicked are not so: That is a statement of fact from the God who knows the end. They may appear to prosper, but their life is chaff which the winds of judgment will yet scatter. They have neither root, nor life, nor continuance. They must fall and will be crushed by the Stone that could have been the Foundation of their life. Jesus says the chaff will be burned, but the wheat gathered in. Note the negative and positive sides of the godly man. First he refuses to be part with ungodly schemes or persons. Then he delights himself in God. He sets his heart on God and finds, not necessarily in an easy way, his roots going down to the springs of Life that cannot run dry.

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What the first Psalm says in a personal way, the second says on a national or international level. Why do the heathen rage? Why indeed: All their schemes are doomed to failure and confusion before they start, for the Lord who knows their secret thoughts and intentions against His holy work and purposes is not flustered by their wrath. He is so sure of the final victory that He is prepared to give the enemy his head for a season, then, (v.5) when the hour is come, God will speak and vex and break with a rod of iron. His throne is set. His King is enthroned. Men may have despised and rejected that King, mocking His claims and vowing allegiance to the Caesars of this world, but in the end every knee shall bow, some in glad worship, and 'some in fearful judgment. Be wise. Give to the Son the kiss of love and loyalty. Blessed are all those who trust in Him, for His Kingdom cannot fail. That is our assurance in dark days, and our delight at all times.

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If your life is a calm flowing stream, this Psalm will have little for you; but if you are battling against wars without and fears within, then there is grace for you here. The title tells the circumstances, and they -are sore. There are no wounds so deep as those received from someone you have loved and cared for. David wakes in the morning, after a night in the hills and his first thought is of his troubles. Men said, 'There is no hope in God for the likes of him'. They believed him to be cast off from God, and David himself knew there were many reasons why that should be. This was happening after his sin concerning Uriah, but what men did not know was the repentance of Ps.51. Even if they knew they would not give him credit, for there is no forgiveness with men. But David knows he is not abandoned by God. He cries, shield me, vindicate me, lift up my head before them that would humiliate me. God heard him; David's fear subsided; his strain eased; and he was at peace. He knew that the God who had watched over him in the night would keep his going out and coming in. He lived as he slept, safe in the arms of his God. On Jesus' bosom, nought but calm is found.

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The evening prayer of a sorely tried man of God as he prepares to lie down for the night. He was God's mans mid he knew it; yet the persistent slanders of men dogged him and none can know the hurt of David's heart, none that is, but God, who shared it and would requite it. The distress of the saints and servants of God is not to be wondered at, for they are true brothers of the Men of Sorrows. David first turns to the God who has delivered him in the past, and almost in passing testifies that in past distresses his whole life, has been enlarged. One result of this is an awareness that God does not chop and change his servants though they may be far from perfect. This is the strength of the afflicted saints. God has set them apart for Himself, and woe to those who malign the anointed of God. God is on the side of His servants, for, even when they have sinned grievously, (and God does not need gossip to tell Him of that, He knows: the sinning saint has already told Him.) their heart is fixed on God. God knows that; so does David, and he lies down in peace to sleep. Do thou likewise troubled servant, and sleep sweetly.

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This is the prayer of a man exposed to danger through the scheming of unscrupulous enemies. But why are the saints so constantly in battle? Simply because they are saints, drawn into the workings of God, and thus the object of attack from the Enemy, through evil and jealous men who are his instruments. David's prayer is that he might be led aright in God's way for, him, so that thereby he will be preserved from falling into the snares of his enemies. (7-8) You are always safe when you are where God wants you. You may not be spared conflict, but the God whose will you do, is altogether holy and righteous, and He will not only keep His own, He will smite, confound and bring to naught all who by lying tongue or deceitful action raise themselves against the work or people that is holy, unto the Lord. The holiness of God is the confident shelter of His people. It is also the seal of doom to His enemies, for He shall confound them by their own counsels and schemes. What a God to work for.

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The change of tone between verses 7-8 is the guide to the message of the Psalm. David has been suffering long sickness which has brought him near to death. He has felt this to be a token of God's displeasure, and his enemies have been taunting him accordingly, rubbing in his guilt as men are wont to do. The first seven verses reveal David to be in depths of despair, and well-nigh at breaking point. That is not to be wondered at, for, sin in the life of a servant of God takes a terrible toll. Men recognise the sin and its issue, but they do not see, nor can they recognise, nor would they give credit for the depth of penitence and godly sorrow as evidenced here in David's words. His enemies took delight in his misery, and his friends stood aloof. The darkness is almost complete when the light of the fact of the forgiveness of God dawns upon him, and he sweeps away the carping of his miserable accusers, and his soul rises singing like the lark into the blue skies of God's freedom and delight. Here is the word for today to all who feel sorely their sins: GOD FORGIVES.

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7:1-10

Spurgeon calls this the Song of the Slandered Saint, a title appropriate to the time when David was being hounded by Saul and men such as Cush, mentioned only in the title, were poisoning Saul's mind and inflaming him against David. This is an old sin, and the devilish effect of gossiping slandering tongues is no lees now than before. The tongue is set on fire of hell, and in the long run the speaker is burned up, as well as the one spoken against. Many a servant of God has had his work partly blighted by this hellish, murmuring slander. But there is an answer: GOD HIMSELF. David turns to God from the ravening lions of slander. He pleads his innocence. Lord, if what they say is true, let me pay the price of my sins. But, since it is false, twisted, exaggerated, arise, O Lord unto judgment on my behalf. Expose them that speak ill and let the -world see them for what they are, evil in mind as well as mouth. Bring their wickedness to an end. It is public vindication David asks for, and in v.10 he says it rests with God to defend him. No man who trusts God like that is ever confounded.

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7:11-17

The theme of personal vindication is now developed in a general application or exposition of the certainty of the judgment of God. It is a healthy man who believes in the judgment to come, not least since judgment often comes far sooner than expected. God is angry with the wicked every day, and if they do not repent and mend their ways God will take a dealing with them. And His dealings are very thorough. But there is another aspect of God's judgment in v.14-16. There is the natural result of wicked actions, wherein a man's sins find him out, catch up on him and take their pound of flesh. Many a time we wonder why certain things happen to certain people, when there is no apparent, immediate reason. The person could no doubt tell us that he is reaping what he had sown months or years earlier. If you play with moral or spiritual fire you will find that the cinders retain their heat, and with the faintest breath of encouraging air, they will kindle and burn you. Be careful; very careful!

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What is man, after all? It depends on your standpoint: Some regard man as the master of things, and glory in man's apparent dominion over things and people. But man is more and more seen as captive and slave of a system of his own making. What is man compared to all the mighty glories of nature? He is a puny speck, somewhat pathetic in his bravado as he faces the uncertainty of each returning day. Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return. What is your life? It is a vapour that appears for a season then vanishes away. That is man without God. Like a rudderless, captain less ship on the sea of life and heading for the rocks and a grim grave. But God bath set His heart on man. He is mindful of him. God bath made man with a destiny of glory and dominion. God bath given man a capacity for the eternal, so that man will never be at rest till he finds rest in Him. God visits man, seeking and calling, Where art thou? And when you, (for you are that man) answer His voice, and feel His moulding hands upon your life again, and submit to His pressures and indications, all you could never be by yourself will begin to come to pass. To think the Lord God Almighty bothers with me to that great extent: O Lord, my Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth.

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9:1-11

Psalms are difficult to divide, and cannot in the space available be commented on verse by verse. Take this thought today. This man's God is a personal God. Note the repetition of 'I'. God is someone to be known, to be trusted, depended on. He is someone to talk to in the context of daily living. Now what kind of God have you? Do you really know Him? Can you be wholehearted about Him? Do you ever get excited about God; your heart moved so that you find yourself telling people what God means to you and what He has done for you? God is the surest thing in this man's life, and he would never try to live without Him nor try to cross His will and command for life. He knows whom he has believed and is persuaded that He is able to keep that committed to Him against the day of final things in judgment. That is the Psalmists pleasure as well as peace. Never forget, God is the blessed God, that is the happy God, who imparts happiness to those who trust Him.

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9:12-20

In some ways this is a grim reading for a Sunday, but it is real, since it is true. A man was once asked if he believed in Hell. He answered: "Yes, but I would never preach-it". What a denial of God's truth and calling. Hell is a fact. It is God's hell, and it is not an embarrassment to Him, whatever it be to us with our weakened moral values and judgments. It is time to preach v.19 so that men might be shaken out of their complacency and God-forgetfulness, before the flood of God's judgment comes to sweep them away as it did in the flood when ordinary men and women were found eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. But why were they judged? Simply because God was not in all their thoughts. He had no place in their lives. God, and the man who preached God's warning word, was a joke and an embarrassment. They mocked, but they perished. Be not like them. As we survey the world scene, and the ecclesiastical scene, with so much that grieves, we tremblingly say, Arise O Lord, let not man prevail. He will. And we wait for Him to do so!

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The apparent triumph of wrong over right in human life brings often to the lips of men the question, Why! When godless men say, why does God not do something, the best answer is to ask why should He. The Almighty is not at man's beck and call; and, after all, God is not responsible for the chaos man has made in the world. But here, it is the godly man who feels that God is standing back as a spectator, allowing evil full, rampant sway, and doing nothing to check it. Why does God act thus? It is because He prefers not to make a show of His working. At times, God's face is shaded from His children because of their sin. Sometimes he hides Himself so that we might learn faith and be refined in character. God's ways are not our ways and we must learn what God is like. Then, no matter the complexity of the human situation; no matter if evil seems to swim over what we believed precious to God; no matter the continued mockery of godless men; this is our refuge and strength - v.14 Thou hast seen it! Yes God has seen and heard, and will deal with it in His good time. Wait, and you will see.

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Read this Psalm again to pinpoint the characteristics of those the Bible calls wicked. v.2 They are hard when they think they will get off with it. v.3 Boastful. v.4 Not interested in God in any practical, living sense. God just does not come into their life, and they scorn holy things. v.6 There is a deep complacency, quite unrelated to facts. They think they can look after themselves, whereas they know not what a day may bring. v.7 They are false, particularly in speech and cannot be trusted. v.11 They make the mistake that, having got off with it once, twice, yea many times, it will continue so. That is false accountancy. God sees and will yet present such men with an account that will declare their spiritual bankruptcy and deliver them to the judges. Read Romans 2:1-16 and remember that no man escapes the vigilant eye and righteous judgment of God either in this life or the next. Appearances are deceptive. Facts are sure.

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David is in danger of his life in the court of Saul. The King's jealousy finds many collaborators among David's enemies. The darkness of the situation is such that the fearful advise David to flee. They had lost heart and were resigned. Their high hopes had perished in the sea of difficulties. What can one or two do, they said. If the foundations be destroyed, all is lost. David takes up their argument right there, agreeing with their conclusion but denying the fact from which they reasoned. The foundation is far from destroyed. God is in His holy temple, and He rules from His throne. The foundation of God standeth sure. (2 Tim.2:19) Think of Hopeful in Pilgrim's Progress as he encourages Christian who feels he is sinking 'I feel the bottom, and it is good'. Aye it is good indeed. It is the rock of God's sovereign will, an infallible Bible, and a Cross towering o'er the wrecks of time. Flee? Surrender? Never; here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God.

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If the world asks the Church any question at all these days it is this: Is there a word from God? The answer is yes! From beginning to end of the Bible we have the Word of the living God; a Word that even preachers nowadays shy away from, as if they feared to tell men what God was saying. The God-given, God-breathed Scriptures are the Word of God. They are pure words, tried and proven, and they abide when all man's babblings are silenced. This is what God is saying - v.5. I will arise, and no man will be able to withstand Me. I will set in safety the man that is mine, and those vain-puppets who puff their fury against him will do so in vain. These are strong and comforting words and they found a lodging in the Psalmist's heart. But the man of God is a very human man, and that is why the cry at the beginning is a very plaintive one. The loneliness of a faithful saint in a day of declension and lukewarmness is not easily described. It is the soul's Gethsemane. It is also where you meet God face to face, and when you have done that, the faces of even the fiercest hypocritical men are never so frightening again.

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With wars without and fears within, David cries four times in the first-two verses, 'How long?'. . Is it not a comfort to see how much the heroes of the faith knew of battle and temptation. It was their usefulness to God that drew on them the attention of the Evil One. One particular person seems to be indicated in v.2, 4; someone who has dogged David's steps for a longtime until the poor man is well-nigh exhausted, feeling that this relentless antagonist will overpower him. Then something happens between v.4 and 5 for David begins to sing. What did God say to him? We cannot say, but its truth gripped David's heart, reassuring him that he had no cause to be cast down or discouraged. He would wait upon God, and he would yet have cause to praise Him. Contrary circumstances are often a blessing in disguise. Out of these times, as out of the presses of pain, comes the soul's best wine.

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These words are repeated in Ps. 53, and again in Romans 3 and must therefore be important. The context is helpful in contrast. Ps.13 speaks of personal faith. Ps.15 tells of the life God requires. This Psalm shows the attitude and life of a man who has neither faith nor life. Such a man is a fool, for when he came to the end of his life he would discover there was a God, a real God, and to such as he who had lived in contempt and rejection of Him, He is a grim God. There are many fools, who, at the end of life will find they have miscalculated, and are on the losing side. Some people refuse to talk about religious things because they say such things are-private. But you can always tell what a person's thoughts are about God simply by watching the kind of life they live. If God does not come into it save for a grudging hour on a Sunday morning,, do they believe in God? . The Devil takes more notice than that! Every day, every hour God looks down to see what you are doing. Thou God seest me. God is always near me, hearing what I say; Knowing all my thoughts and deeds, all my work and play. That's enough to think about for one day.

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Here is a question and an answer, tremendously practical and searching. Here is a comment by the Rev. Wm. Still: "Who shall be a friend of God and stand firm against evil? He whose Christian life is through and through, and bears the inspection of others, himself and God; he who is honest in word, deed, and thought; who is devoid of bitterness (3); who hates evil, fears God, and who can be trusted to stand by his pledged word, even to his own hurt; who does not seek gain without honest work; who wouldn't take a mean advantage. O for a clear conscience! Righteousness makes peace." This is the life that pleases God, and makes a man a tower of reliable strength in the Church of Jesus Christ. This is the proof of a man's conversion, that he begins to manifest the character of Christ, for it is none other than Jesus who is described here. Are you converted?

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This man is contented, for he has found the secret of a happy life. He glances at the so called pleasures of the world, and will' have none of them. He would rather have his God, and with Him, the solid joy and lasting treasure that is the portion of His children in this life and-the next. The Lord is all he needs to satisfy his hunger and thirst. (5) We taste Thee, O Thou living bread, and long to feast upon Thee still. How sweet Jesus can be to the human heart as we walk by the green pastures and quiet waters; pleasant places indeed. It is a happy life when you have Jesus, and He leads you further on so that your path is as a shining light increasing more and more unto the perfect day. When we get to heaven we shall drink our fill at the fountains of pleasure that we have tasted here below as we companied with the Master. Souls of men, why will ye scatter from such a love and such a Saviour. O taste and see that the Lord is good. Be like David, and let his testimony be yours in the words of v.9. You will never-go wrong, because God Himself will keep you right.

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It is all very well to speak as we did yesterday when all life flows smoothly, but now David is again undergoing a time of testing, and it is here that a man is seen for what he really is. The Psalmist was so often right up against it that he had to learn faith or sink, He learned. Here he is bold to state his case before God. Hear a just cause O God, and give your verdict. My steps have held fast is his claim in v.5. This is not spiritual pride. It is fact. David is confident in that he has dealt rightly with God, and therefore he can pray. This he does-in v.6-24, asking three things of the strong saving God, who is yet so very full of tender loving kindness, (7) Hear me, keep me, hide me. Lord they come to cast me down, (v.11- not bowing down) disappoint then, and deliver me by thy sword and by thy hand. Lord do something about them because I am yours. Have you learned to be like this? Under the shadow of thy - throne, Thy saints have dwelt secure. Sufficient is Thine arm alone, and our defence is sure. False confidence? No! Rightful expectation as we read in Isa. 54: 17.

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17:15

Did you think we had forgotten the last verse? It is inscribed on the stone at the head of the grave of the sweetest saint the minister has ever known. She was full of grace, and her touch was kindness itself. Her voice in prayer could melt your heart and she loved to speak about Jesus. She had known her full share of sorrows and trials, and to serve her Master well was all her desire and delight. It was her own wish that these words should be on the gravestone. Ten years and more have passed since she went to be with the Lord she loved, but her memory is still an inspiration to seek after the Lord, so that it might be with us as it was with her. Lord, do this for us and make us men and women of grace. Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me, All His wondrous compassion and purity. Oh Thou Saviour divine, all my nature refine, till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. We will be satisfied. So will Jesus.

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18:1-15

Read the title and marvel at the mixture of sweetness and bitterness that was David's life. It must always be so for the Christian, for as long as we are here in this wicked world, there is no final rest or peace. -At times we taste the joys of heaven itself. 'At other times the floods almost swamp us; but we can still look back to see how through thick and thin the goodness and mercy of God have followed us. When you think of how many times we might have shipwrecked our life; disgraced ourselves and our families; and how wonderfully God has preserved us, there is only one reaction. I will love Thee O Lord. Nearly fifteen years ago in a little meeting in Bombay when the minister was unexpectedly asked to give his testimony, (silly thing to do when he was only a few weeks. a Christian) he could only quote the words of the hymn that had been sung: I never will cease to praise Him, He's done so much for me. The mighty God pictured here in the thunderstorm, who delivers and preserves His own, is a God to be trusted and loved.

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18:16-30

The Psalmist's heart is overflowing with gratitude but his feet stay firmly grounded on facts. v.19 says first that it was because God delighted in him that he was kept, and not through worth or virtue of his own. Then he goes on to say that he has dealt rightly and squarely with God. This is why we are so often shamefully confounded. We tamper with the forbidden thing; we sail as near the wind as a regenerated conscience will allow; but this man (23) kept watch lest any sin should find a comfortable lodging in his life. It is one thing to have a besetting sin, or grievous tendency in our nature; God knows and makes allowance: but it is another thing to be promiscuous in indulging these dangerous inclinations and fascinations. Enough of this weakness. There is no need for it if the mighty Christ is your Saviour. It may be irreverent, but it is true, that God helps those who help themselves. When you pray, Lead us not into temptation, show a clean pair of heels and away from things and people likely to bring you down. This is sanity.

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18:31-50

How different is this mighty hymn of praise from many of the sentimental ditties men sing, even in Church. It is God, first, last, and all the time. Whatever man is able to accomplish, and it involves him in a great deal of energy consuming service, the source of the strength, direction, continuance and fruit was God alone. Without Him we can do nothing at all. This man in the Psalm is on the crest of the wave of triumphant rejoicing, yet is able to recognise things as they really are. In v.35 he utters the secret of true greatness in human life, and certainly in Christian service. Gentleness and greatness go together and as one increases, so does the other, We are deceived. We are impressed with those who make a lot of noise. In evangelical circles we are guilty of the idolatry of personality and eloquence, especially the alliterative kind. But though we speak with the tongues of men and of angels, sending sparks flying in all directions, (more sparks than fire) and have not meekness, lowliness, gentleness, humility, submission, self-abasement, we are nothing. Jesus said, Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. That is rest. It is also the beginning of service.

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The Lord's Day is the day for the Lord's Book. See that it has its rightful place. All the saints of God have been men of one book. They have been men of culture, appreciating to the full all the wonders of God's world, not least the beauties and grandeur of nature here spoken of; the sky, mountains, sea and storm, nightfall and dawn. But all these things either have no speech, or their speech tells of true fulfilment elsewhere. There is only one sure word; only one book where we are told that the mighty God loves and cares for us; only one lamp to our feet and light to our path; only one book that can meet us in joy or sorrow; only one book that leads us to a living Saviour and Friend and Comforter. That book is the Bible, the Law of the Lord, perfect in its parts and its wholeness; perfect in its instruction and influence. It is a healthy and health-giving book, more to be desired than all the wisdom of frail perishing men. Cherish your Bibles, and learn to find in the pages the person of the Saviour and the voice of the living God. What a thrill to have God speak to you day by day.

19

This Psalm is worthy of more time. There are six titles given to the Word of the Lord; six adjectives describing it; and six effects issuing from it. It is Law, balanced and complete, authoritative and convicting, bringing to Christ in conversion, It is testimony, bearing, witness to God's will and man's duty, sure and unchanging, and instructing the man whose heart is open to receive it. It is statutes, precepts, or injunctions which when obeyed, rejoice the heart. It is commandment, thundering with authority, pure like the sun, bringing light to darkened consciences. It is fear, produced by the word, which is clean and anything but morbid or morbid-making. It is judgment, for the Word pronounces finally in all things concerning man, and there is no court of appeal other than the Word. There is no mistake. God's verdict is always true and right. How we take gladly the latter verses which speak of the pleasure and profit of the Word. Oh how I love thy law. It is my meditation day and night.

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My grace is sufficient for thee. That is what the Psalmist proves over and over again; not only that God is there with him, but that He provides and orders for those that love and serve Him. Here the king prepares for war, offers sacrifice, and commits his cause to God. Then in spite of the fact that the enemy is strong, such is their faith and trust that they begin to praise for victory before the war starts. This is not false confidence. If God be for us, who can be against us! Who indeed dare try/ It would be better for them in the, long run if they didn't: If God points us a certain way, and our hearts are set to do His will, then no matter the array of difficulties and resistance, He will bring us in to victory. (Numbers 14:7-9). There is no hesitation here; no truck with policy or cunning; they hoist their banner, declaring whose they are and whom they serve. They sit, as it were, to feast at a table, in the presence of their enemies. Their God is in the midst of them, and as in the time of the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord will put a difference between His own and their enemies, and the Lord will fight for His people. (Ex.14:13-31) Be still and know that I am God. Fear ye not.

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21:1-7

For some this is a special Psalm for a special day, and it is full of thanksgiving to God for His goodness and blessing. Selah means, think on that, and 'David ponders and marvels at how, through what at times seemed strange and unpromising ways God gave him the desire of his heart. Here was a man who had gone tremblingly into battle after the heart cry of prayer in the previous Psalm, and he found that God had gone before him. (prevent means to go before) The words of the hymn, "Hast thou not seen, how thy heart's wishes have boon granted in what He ordaineth" find an echoing Amon in the heart of every man or woman who has trusted their life to God. It is not easy to trust God with everything. But it is the only way of peace and gladness, for it is there you know the smile of God and all His reassurances. Read of them in Deut.23:27. Iea.43:2. Ex.33:14. Lift up your eyes and seek His face. Does His smile gladden your heart? Happy are ye! Let nothing over spoil it.

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21:8-13

This half of the Psalm is a different, though not contradictory, story. We give the comment from Gilcomston South Record of May 1953. "Praise to God, not only for His goodness to His own, but for His power over all His enemies. God has the measure of all evil. He holds it in check. He knows its distance and time. He sees to it that it works out its own ruin. We would never know that evil was in its nature self-destructive, if God did not allow it its head. Praise God for His patience and wisdom". Now marvel at the implications and comfort in v.8, 11. The Lord shall ferret out and expose all His enemies. But more: they shall plan evil and not be able to perform it. They may not understand the restraint that is laid on them, but restraint there will be, for God will paralyse their capacity for action. cf. Ps.76:10. God makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and when men would go further, which would be inconvenient to God and unsuitable for His plans, He declines permission and calls a halt. This is a God to praise, trust, and fear.

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22:1-21

This Psalm Jesus made His own, and the opening words take us right to the Cross where the Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep. We read here, in greater detail than in the Gospels, the agonies of the death of Jesus. But just as the cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me" gave way to the quietness of "Into Thy hand I commend my spirit" then the triumph of "It is finished", so here the Holy Spirit, speaking through and beyond David's experience, pens a picture of the Saviour and of the Servant of the Lord. When He died, they mocked, saying, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save". That is the path of all service that is fruitful. You cannot preserve yourself safe, and at the same time be the instrument of another's salvation. Men waited (v.8) for God to confound him, and they licked their lips in anticipation. Then when death came, seemingly the end, the enemy was confounded, because the death was followed by rising again. There is much instruction here from our Pattern, but our main thought is of what the blessed Saviour suffered. He loved me, and gave Himself to this for me. How wonderful. How humbling.

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22:1-21

Read these verses again and apply them to personal life as we seek to serve the Lord. v.1-10 are a cry of despair. None but Jesus dare ask why. God might tell us, and it would be too much to bear. God remains silent and bears the burden of knowledge. In Jesus' case, and ours, the answer to the question is found only in the redeeming purposes of God for men. If God is doing something through our sufferings, something which cannot be done otherwise, then, our agony makes sense. David is driven back to facts. Thou are holy, and David begins to rebuke himself (6) and shame is added to his sense of aloneness. Then comes the reproach and rejection and ridicule of men, for his failure seems obvious. But the man knows God is in this. (15) He could not explain, and bring forth proofs; nor would he try - that would be casting pearls before swine. He simply cries to God, yields and waits, knowing that no man suffers in vain. There are deep and comforting words in this Psalm. Ponder them well, perhaps Hymn 100 would help. The way of the Cross is still the way of sorrow, but to find the fellowship of the Saviour there, turns sorrow into joy.

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22:22-31

Now things are different,. Suffering and death are not the end for the servant of the Lord. With the morn comes resurrection, and tears give place to gladness and rejoicing. When God's appointed day comes, the vindication of His servant is glorious and unmistakeable. The pulse of praise here is great with power. The kingdom is the Lords! Why then, art thou cast down my soul, what should discourage thee? What indeed! Do you doubt God's power to bring you to triumphant fulfilment? Shall Ho who has brought you thus far, leave you now in darkness and incompleteness? We cannot see the full end of the work God is doing, not yet at least, but a generation shall arise, born, of God through the anguish of His true servants, and they shall praise the Lord. They shall also call you blessed, who have travailed in many days of darkness until Christ was formed in than. They shall come! Remember that Christ's cause was at its lowest, numerically speaking, in the hour of His triumphant death and resurrection. When it finally appears what God has been doing in us and through us, our doubts will seem very unworthy, but our praises shall be real. This is the Lord's doing. Blessed be His glorious name for ever and forever.

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Here is the Psalm we use for every occasion of life, from deepest sorrow to highest happiness. It is a strong Psalm, yet infinitely tender. v.1 sums it all up in one majestic statement of faith and fact. v.2-5 describe the ways in which the need is met. v.6 tells that this shepherd God shall not change, therefore all is well. But while we marvel today at the swoop of the words, remember that behind all the wonder of grace to men, there lies the agony of Psalm 22. The Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep, first laid down His life for them. Before the sheep could be cared for they had to be found, and the good Lord has had to go to many queer and sinister places to find some of us. But He came to seek and to save that which was lost. We cannot explain the miracle of conversion, we only marvel at it, and rejoice that with certainty we can name Him as our own Shepherd, because we have learned to trust Him. The Lord: what a contrast to the passing, uncertain generations of men. The unchanging God, who is everlasting strength, is my shepherd. He will watch over me, knowing how far I can journey in the heat of the day; seeing me safe home night by night; leading me, not driving me, in the paths that are best for me; missing me when I wander from my place; welcoming me when I come back. What a Shepherd! I shall not want.

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23

It is not too much to spend two days here. The mighty God, the Lord of Hosts, the Governor of the ages, who holds the whole wide world in His hand, cares for me. Whatever is happening to you these days, it matters to God about you. But He is a real Shepherd. He will not let you stay by pastures that are going done. He will lead you to fresh spheres where He will delight your soul with fatness. Never fear the changes. God knows where He is leading you. When you feel soiled and weary with sin and struggling He will restore, and enfold you in grace. After times of quiet rest and feeding, He will load you on further, for His purposes for you are far greater than you think. It may mean dark valleys but He will be there to calm your fear. However dark it seems, remember, God's ways are never a dead end. You will have enemies; wolves who will try to raven you; but so surely will the Shepherd's power hold them back, that even in their presence, you will sit down at peace to enjoy a feast of His love. He anoints your head, not only to heal the sores of the heat of the day, but owning you as His own, for all to see. If all this is true; and it has been so when we look back over life; surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all my days Lord, help us to believe it will be so, without seeing them in advance.

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24:1-6

The Word of God refuses to stoop to the petty bickering of men. It states with great finality, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fulness there of.' It is His by Creation, by Providence, and by Redemption. This is the great and mighty God in who we trust. Consider all the world rulers of the nations, fixing territorial limits, claiming self-government, raising armies, slaying innocents, blackmailing each other with threats of bombs. Who do they think they are? The earth is the Lord's, and is in fact under His government and control to such an extent that

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even the wickedest man alive is serving the inexorable purpose of the living God. Have you learned to see the marks of God's hand on human situations? Have you learned to see it in your own life? What is' God doing with you these days. He does not believe in wasting time. Now, if He is working to purpose, who shall dwell with Him? v.3-6 tell the answer: The man that is holy: Hands tell the state of the heart. Speech tells the state of the soul,. The man who is prepared to walk out in the open in absolute honesty with God, he shall receive in his person and work, the blessing of God. See ye to it.

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24:7-10

How right it is to sing those words on a Communion Sunday, for they speak of the coming again of the great King, to receive His .kingdom and manifest His glory. But He is not alone. With Him there marches all who have companied with Him in faithfulness of trust and service. Men and women of God, lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh. cf. Isaiah 35:10 - The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their head. Take heart, you warriors of the living God. Today, the noise of battle, the next the victor's song. Not even the gates of Hell can stand against this all-conquering Jesus. He marches on and on and on, and n no can say Him nay. He hath sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat. He is sifting out the hearts of men before ill's judgment seat. O be swift my soul to answer Him, be jubilant my foot. Our God is marching on. He is indeed: and His footsteps echo the thrill of certainty within our souls.

Hallelujah. Amen.

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25:1-7

David is a big man for he opens his heart to us in this Psalm of sin and forgiveness, and when anyone so honours us by telling of the secret grief of sins committed we must deal gently and wisely. Here is a man who has served the Lord long and well. He has sinned, and knows it, for it troubles and distresses him. He grieves, because he now lives with the issue of his sin in his person and circumstances, and he cries to the Lord as faith wrestles with despair. It is not merely formal forgiveness that he wants, but restoration back into the love and service of the Father's home. His soul is sick, his heart sore, nerves jangled, body ill at ease and worn, all as a result of his sin. v.7 speaks of the wanderings of youth and the rebellions of maturity. Sin is a dread taskmaster; a foe to be guarded against at all times. David prays, not a nice formal petition, but a cry for protection and deliverance from circumstances of his own making, (2-3). Then, 'in v.4-5 he asks to be treated as a child, not being shown the far distances, but led step by step, being taught of God the things that are his highest good. Last of all in v.7 we read the words of a saint and servant who has grieved his God. In some ways this is a sore Psalm; but then sin is sore, to God and to us.

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25:8-14

David's anguish as a result of his sin has turned his thoughts away from himself to God who is his hope and stay. There is no peace for David in himself; only in what God has revealed Himself to be is there rest. He begins to find reassurance, but who amongst us does not understand the sudden stab of pain in v.11 RS his sin sears again his tender conscience. This of course, is devils work. It is the enemy who tries to keep us bogged down in our sins. If you look back to v.1, the word 'lift' suggests a struggle to lift a heavy, unwilling burden. Many a time the soul clings heavily to the dust, and by faith we must lift it up until some gleam of grace comes to cheer and cheer and reassure. This man marvels at the goodness and kindness of God with sinners. There is no bitterness with David as there is with some who blame God for not keeping them from sin in spite of themselves. Be quite sure, if you are determined to fly in the face of God He will allow it to your own hurt. But the meek, who are humble enough to hear the voice of God in the speech of circumstances, will be led of God, will dwell at ease, free from exhausting tensions, and shall find the secret friendship of God Himself. This is the peace of those who fear, trust and love Him.

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25:15-22

We can think of many times when David eyed forbidden fruit to his cost. It is a healthy Christian who keeps looking into the face of God to be assured of His pleasure in their doing and planning. The lust of the eyes can become a fire that consumes the inner being. What the eye sees the mind savours, the emotions feel and the life does. cf. Matt.6:22-23. By his tampering with the forbidden, David finds himself, even after assured of forgiveness, still living with the remembrance, and issue of his sins in his own personality and in the persecutions of his enemies. His distress is in part his own doing, yet there is no excuse for the grim attitude of his enemies, and David is not afraid to claim that in spite of all appearances and undeniable evidence of sin and failure, he is still God's man. His heart is fixed. Though he has fallen, he shall arise again wiser, maturer, and more careful. He prays in v.20-21 Keep me; deliver me; I trust Thee; I wait on Thee. This is not pious talk, for he recognises that integrity and uprightness alone constitute safety for the man of God. Double dealing with men or God will always result in chaos. Be warned. Be open. Be real. Be safe.

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Not many people are able to call God to witness the reality of their life and on that basis to request God to do them justice. That is exactly what David does here. We need to remember that while the Bible never whitewashes the sins of the saints, and tells grimly of the consequences of sin in the life of the believer, the saints remain saints. They are men separated by the grace of God to the service of God. They are separated, not by formal or outward dedication, but by an inner conviction of mind and consent of heart. That is something which holds you to God even when by appearances men would conclude that God could not possibly have anything more to do with you. God does not chop and change His servants. He perseveres with them, even when they are stubborn and stumbling, for He knows that their hearts belong by love to Him. You cannot be a true Christian, and you will never stand the strain of true service unless your heart and feelings are involved. You may be a well-oiled theological or evangelistic machine but until your heart loves the Lord you are an uncertain, unreliable and unhappy being. In this Psalm when the surging sea of evil activity would overwhelm him, David pleads that behind the obvious sins and errors of his life there is a heart of love and loyalty, and on that ground he claims protection and vindication, and he gets them. The Lord looks after those who love Him.

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Better read this Psalm again. Our speech, our company, and our activities are the things that betray us. We are never really overcome by circumstances, only exposed by them, and David's trial (v.2) merely reveals the basic fact of his life, that he was steadfast, unmoveable and single hearted. This is evident from the testimony as to his behaviour in v.4-8. In every community and company, bad hearts and evil intentions will congregate into a sinister clique, cynical and contemptuous. They will smile at you with their faces but their eyes will be dark and cold. Their honeyed words will conceal the poison of asps. Be watchful and keep clear of all such dissemblers, for if you don't, you will never have anything to tell of the wondrous works of God, save in judgment, for God is against all such. David withdrew himself, and life was lonely. His delight in God was tinged with pain, as it must always be in this world where we are strangers and pilgrims. But it was thus that he found an even place. In detachment from the world and attachment to God he found his whole life being integrated in peace and poise that passed all understanding. That is life, and it is eternal.

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27:1-6

This is the song of a soul in danger and it falls into two parts which are strikingly different. The verses for today are brim full of assurance. Tomorrow we see the same man fighting for faith because of the onslaught of feelings which have well-nigh swamped him. Feelings are a problem, and we are too influenced by them. We must find the anchorage of our life in facts. But we have to dig down to the foundation of facts, and we shall never do that without considerable effort which takes time and trouble. Don't envy people who have made something of their lives and have found peace and poise. Work as hard as they did and do, and yours will be the same reward. Here is a man who has proved what God can do in his life. He faces the possibilities of evil and says - Let than

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all come. If God be for me, who can be against me. He did not come to faith like this easily. He tells in v.4 that he is possessed of an holy ambition to be all that God wants him to be; and to be this, he is prepared to carve his way through all hindrances. Is this growling, battling, dogged faith too grim? Not a bit of it. He says he will see the beauty or delight or pleasantness or friendliness of God. This is indeed a banqueting house and His banner over us is love.

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27:7-14

Now all his assurance and joy is blanketed with cold, clammy feelings. There is a dread that the face of God is turned away from him, and he becomes very aware of the presence of his watchful foes. (v.11 - enemies) Along with this comes the accusing remembrance of his sins, adding to the uncertainty beginning to fester in his heart. This is the enemy's work. It has all the marks of cowardly, accusing Satan. But David fights back. v.10 is so sweet yet a little sad, for David is saying God is all he has left. But it is true. God has in fact promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and since David believes this, he does not faint, for, since God is God, and since David is God's man, he believes he shall see the vindication of his person and work amongst men. Since that is so: 'Wait I say on the Lord: It is the end that counts, and he laughs longest who laughs last. Think of God's word to a man like Jacob in Genesis 28:15, then sing with the Psalmist the song of faith. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God. (Ps.146:5).

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At first it is difficult to see what specific word this Psalm has for us. It is in four connected parts. v.1-2 are Prayer. v.3-5 the attitude to people stemming from his prayer. v.6-8 his confidence. v.9 is prayer or doxology. In a sense it is all prayer, and that is the vital breath of Christian living. Prayer is the ground of life, the guide of life, the power of life and the service of life. If that be so, how much of our Christian life is of real value? This is a man who knows God to speak to. He expects God to hear, not only his words, but the deep supplications of his heart that he cannot put into words. He draws consciously nearer to God when he sees the doings and the departing of the ungodly, and his prayer increases. It is hard to say whether separation from ungodly things and people stimulates prayer or prayer brings about separation. The two certainly go together. This man's prayer is neither fern nor speech, but a walk with God in which he finds he is helped, for the strength of his God is the strength of tenderness and gentleness. He is a kind God, who saves, blesses, shepherds (feeds - v.9) and lifts them up to their feet and back to the way. What a comfort.

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The Psalmist is saying 'O, magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together'. God is named over twenty times in a few verses. It is God first, last, and all the time. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending. He encircles the whole earth and governs all its ways. He works all things according to the counsel of His own will and none can say Him nay. Everything speaks His glory. The Psalm is full of the deep-throated laughter of God who is confident in His own strength and grace. He is the God of Glory. He is the God we meet at every turn of life. He is a God to be feared and worshipped in the beauty of holiness. He is a God who cares for His people. He gives them strength, and when at His feet you lay down your burden of carefulness, He bears you upon His heart and gives you peace. Look abroad through the world; face every frightening possibility; marvel at the unrestrained wickedness of men; then remember that this God, who is your God and mine, is still on the throne. Fear not. He knows what He is doing: and He is busy doing it!

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David looks back over his life and remembers what God has done for him. He is aware of a time when, after he had served long and well, he foundered and fell. He was shattered; he was brought low with sickness, nigh unto death; all that was precious to him was snatched from his grasp; and but for God's very gracious dealing he would have remained another wreck on life's shore: a glorious 'might-have-been'. What had happened? It was

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something to which we are all very prone. He overestimated his spiritual strength. He had had many dealings with God; he had grown in many ways; he had also grown too confident, and as a result he had lulled himself to sleep. God will not allow that, and He smartly chastises His servant, shattering his comfortable complacency, and making him look to his life. We must believe that God is prepared to go to any length to deliver us from the spiritual dangers that He sees, even when we are still unaware of them. When God troubles or dismays us, instead of wallowing in self pity, ask Him what is wrong, and when He tells you, humble your proud heart under his discipline and learn wisdom.

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30

Ponder this deep lesson again. The scripture says, 'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion', (Wives 6:1) for that is greater danger than flagrant sin. A little concession to the flesh here; a little (harmless of course:) excursion into worldliness there; a little easing off of spiritual discipline, and before you know, the whole structure of your Christian life has begun to crumble. It happens long before you are aware of it. Like Samson you seek to go about the Lord's business, knowing not that the Lord has departed from you. You may retain all the appearances of former days, (but your friends will be worried about you) yet in terms of usefulness to God you will be discounted. Apart from the favour of God of which v.5 speaks you will quickly sink into the mire of dull, uninteresting uniformity; negative, empty, futile, purposeless and a burden even to yourself. Think of the tragic words of Cowpers hymn - 'Where is the blessedness I knew, when first I saw the Lord'. It is lost. It can be found again, if you are prepared to go back to where you lost your first love. That is a costly road of weeping for a season. But oh the joy when the smile of the Lord breaks in on the soul again!

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31:1-8

This is the first movement of a Psalm that is full of contrasts. Misery and mercy; weeping and rejoicing; fear and faith; all are here. The man is worn out in body and mind, and very naturally cast down. He is despised, defamed and persecuted by men, especially those who think they know him best, his neighbours (11). Perhaps what the neighbours did not know they invented: There are many verses which speak to the heart and we can but take some-of them. The words in v.3 are deep in their revelation of David's character. All that he prays is for the sake of the Name of his God. This man feels that since he has professed the Name of God, then the honour of God is at stake in the eyes of men in what happens to him, his person and his work. This should be a great constraint in our lives. What do men think of our God by watching our lives? That is challenge, but it is also comfort, for God will keep His own. As he faces the wily scheming of men (4) he finds his assurance in a two-fold fact: first his own past experience of God's saving delivering grace, then the fact of the character of God, who is a God of dependable, unchanging truth God is our refuge and strength, therefore will we neither fear nor be moved.

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31:9-18

The remembrance of past mercies highlights the present suffering and distress. There seems to be something here more than the wars without and fears within that are part and parcel of true Christian life and service-The man's whole being is enveloped in a cloud from which he cannot shake free. There is something gnawing at the vitals of his life, eating away his emotional and spiritual energy. What is it? Does God want him to be moaning in distress without relief? It is obvious from the words and tone of the Psalm that the man hates his sins and desires his God. What then is the explanation? This is the work of the unseen accuser, and must be recognised, resisted, and refused, for, if it, is not, it will paralyse us and keep us from useful service. David was not forgotten, nor was he as useless as he is made to feel. (12) He is God's man, and his faith breaks through when he cries - 'My times are in Thy hand'. It means that all life's whys, whens, and how's are in God's hands, and David is content that they should be so. He does not fully understand what God is doing with him, but he is prepared to trust Him, and to believe that He has a good reason for every single move. Do you believe that? Then learn to be content.

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31:19-24

There is no limit at all to the delights God has stored up for those that trust Him, and life is a long series of experiences of discovering how good God is and how tremendously kind. David's heart simply bursts with joy and floods out in words of praise. We, of course, are too stodgy, too pious, too rankly ungrateful, and we take to ourselves the forgiveness of God as if it were our right. We are not so quick to grant forgiveness to others, and we need to remember the appropriate words of the Lord's prayer....as we forgive our debtors. Is it not true that we spend more time bleating painfully about our sins than opening the fountains of praise for what the Lord has done for us? Can it be that we have a secret desire to relive our sins in the remembrance of them? Praise the Lord for His goodness to you: He has shielded you from the pride of men, and delivered you from their tongues. He has been kind in forgiveness and instant to answer your prayers. Has He ever let you down yet? Open your heart and love Him. Let all that is in you praise His holy Name, for He has done so much for you.

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"This Psalm is generally thought to have been composed by David after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. For almost a year he stubbornly refused to acknowledge his sin in spite of the accusing voice of conscience, and it may be, the admonitions of sickness; until the prophet's message struck home to his heart and opened the fountain of penitential tears". (Kirkpatrick) He speaks of the blessedness of forgiveness and teaches that true penitence is the only means of receiving it. Many a time we are sorry that our sinning has hurt us. That is far from enough. We must get to the stage of being sorry we ever sinned because God has been hurt, dishonoured and hindered. Make no mistake, sin gets in the way. Sin also takes a terrible toll of energy. (3-4) Turn up Proverbs 28:13, and let this be our lesson for today. Honesty with God is the only policy that issues in life. See ye to it!

32

Dwell much with gracious words like these. How wonderful it is when the fact of forgiveness dawns upon the guilty, sin-stricken, ashamed soul. How hard the Devil tries to keep us from this fountain of cleansing. There is a remedy for all aspects of our need. The three words for sin in v.1-2 mean rebellion; missing the mark or wandering from the way; and inner perversity or corruption. Three words are also used for forgiveness meaning a burden taken away; a covering so that punishment is no longer called for; and the cancelling of a debt. The Bible leaves us in no doubt as to the evil of sin. Would that we would learn to take it more seriously. At first this soul hid in his sin and the hand of God was heavy on him. Then he came out into the open, acknowledged his wrong, and the smile of God brought heaven to his heart. Think of the prodigal son: it was when he was safely enfolded in the Father's forgiving arms that he at last found words to express the sin and sorrow of his heart. I believe in the forgiveness of sins, and feel there is hope for even me. Thanks be to God.

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33:1-11

The Psalmist and those like him in the Bible went through a lot of trial and sorrow but in doing so they found out a lot about the kind of God they had. These words today form the beginning of a full-throated hymn of congregational praise. Think of the moving of heart we sometimes experience in Church when, in singing praise, we become aware that God Himself is with us. It makes everything different. It makes everything right. All the problems of life still remain, but now they seem small and capable of being dealt with, for in them and through them you see the Lord working and, you know from past experience, and from the Word itself, that all that God does is right, and balanced, and cannot be frustrated. Men and devils have their thoughts, but so has God, and His thoughts are truth and righteousness through all generations. This is the peace and the confidence of our hearts: Our God is marching on. Don't turn your back on Him as if He were not there. Watch the relentless progress of His massive designs for the world, and be swift to answer Him with the obedience of your life. Then, since you know you have a part in something that cannot pass away, let your heart be jubilant, and let your feet follow suit, and your tongue, and your face. If people ask you why you are so happy; tell them! You have a God.

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There is a tremendous realism in the Scriptures, Men like David have no pious thoughts about the world getting better, nor about men being essentially good at heart. Men are not only sick, and needy, they are bad. They are rebels against the sovereignty of God, and their cry is still 'who is the Lord that I should obey Him?' And God is aware of it, He looks down to see. His eye roves through the earth, and there are no secrets from Him. He who made you knows what you are like, and the truth is that whether you own His sway or not, in some way you will serve His purposes. You will glorify God even in Hell: It is the sense of the over-arching strength and certainty of God that makes the Psalmist say Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. There is no fear to those who trust Him. There is reverence, and a real constraint of heart that will prevent you over taking liberties with Him. But this much you know: God is the keeper of your soul: your going out and coming in, God keep for ever will!

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34:1-10

Here is another glowing Song of praise. It is associated with 1 Samuel 21:10-15, when David seems to have been driven to depths of humiliation for fear of his enemies. Looking back on how the Lord had turned the captivity of his circumstances, he can do nothing but praise. Look at v.6 - this poor man cried and the Lord saved him. These verses defy comment. Read them over and over again, and let the sweet remembrance of the Lord's deliverances fill your heart to such an extent that you will seek out some kindred spirit with whom you can praise the Lord. Why does David say he will bless the Lord at all times? Is that not an exaggeration? No. After this experience with Abimelech, David was all alone in the cave of Adullam, and as he pondered how God delivered him from enemies, and from his own fears, he realised how the care of God was such that he need never lower himself again to such humiliating expediency. This is what God does. He lifts up our head, and gives us a sense of the dignity of human personality. He will never slander our worth nor slight our persons. He is the lifter up of our heads and the sweet comforter of our hearts. Praise Him, and prove Him. Blessed is the man that putteth his trust in Him.

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34:11-22

The Psalmist now turns teacher and tells the essential marks of the fear of the Lord that is the beginning and continuance of wisdom. It begins with the tongue: watch what passes your lips, and don't stoop to lies even to extricate yourself from the most embarrassing of situations. Keep from evil, and at the first suggestion of temptation, fly, don't tamper: Seek peace, and don't be discouraged if it should need prolonged effort to overtake it. The easily gained fruits are seldom the sweetest. Let this be your comfort and your warning in v.14-16. God says it and He means it. The righteous man is promised no exemption from evil and trial. If the truth be told he will have more than others, but in the midst of the fire, the flame shall not sear his person, for the Lord stands with him. This needs strong faith, for it means that vindication comes over a long period in which, against all appearances, the Lord's righteous servants will be delivered from successive trials, while in the course of many days they will watch with sober awe the evil of the wicked working out to their own destruction in this life and their judgment in the next. This is grimly realistic, and it makes you draw very near to God in fear and love.

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35:1-16

From beginning to end, this is a cry for help. Relentless enemies were seeking the Psalmist's life. Their hostility is groundless and its maliciousness aggravated by their ingratitude. The greatest hurt always comes when those whom you have befriended and ministered to, turn to rend you with bitter words and evil suggestions. When this happens, the Devil is quick to assault the mind with thoughts that attribute all the blame to ones-self and so deep becomes the desolation and darkness that nothing avails save the answer to the prayer of v.3. We need God Himself to breathe His word of assurance deep into our hearts, for that alone brings peace. We sing a lot about our standing up for Jesus, but here the man asks the Lord to stand up for him. (v.2) God is not slow to do this, and all the Bible is full of assurances as to the protection of God for his beleaguered servants. It is never a light thing to lift hand or voice against a man God has seen fit to bless. God knows the servants sins better than any, and if, with such knowledge, He is still determined to trust and honour the man, then let all else keep

silence. Touch not the Lord's anointed, for if you do, you have God to deal with. cf. Isaiah 54:17.

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35:17-28

There is no doubt at all but that the Psalmist is asking for God to intervene in a human situation and discipline and remove human enemies. If we read in from v.11 we see something of the hellish wickedness of those who in their need drew every ounce of sympathetic kindness from the Psalmist, then when he was in distress, their tongues became scourges of affliction. The open mockery of some men against the truth of God; the bitter and scornful opposition of some backslidden Christians, (if they ever were Christians) is one of the mysteries of this world. Being children of Hell themselves, they do their utmost to draw others into their web of poisonous deceit. Beware of such. Recognise them as being enemies of the Cross of Christ. (Philipp.3:18) 'Don't be soft with them: nor over friendly: nor over patient. They know fine what they are doing, and although it seems they do their damnable work with impunity, the Bible says their foot shall slide in due time. (Deut.32:35) Be sure it will come. Expect it to come. Make sure your own feet are on solid ground.

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Read through the Psalm to see the manifest contrast beginning in v.5. The servant of the Lord is speaking, and he recognises all around him the works of those who in fact serve the Devil. We must not be sentimental about this, for their choice of evil is quite deliberate, and their influence is wholly bad. But over against this, there is the supremacy of the goodness of God in the land of the living. This is the anchorage of faith. We believe God is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. It is not vanity to serve God against all the taunts of wickedness. There are rivers of pleasures all untainted by feelings of shame or regret. With this God, there is the fountain of life, not dependent on outward circumstances, but springing up within the soul. Sometimes when you feel the worldly man has all the profit and the Christian all the battling, remember the words of the hymn: Fading is the worldlings' pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show. Solid joys and lasting treasures none but Zion's children know.

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Read the Psalm again to ponder one verse on which the minister heard his brother preaching many years ago and has never forgotten. The verse is 9a and the sermon was on backsliding. The truth is that from the moment we begin to backslide from the full light of living open faced before God, we begin to lose our spiritual perception and we cannot see aright. We will not be aware of our declension. When people, including preachers, suggest we are not in good heart spiritually, we shall resent it bitterly. We shall go on our way assuming all is well with our life, while in fact, we are getting deeper and deeper into darkness. Then, as with Samson, (Judges 16:20) circumstances will put us to the test, and our fall will be great. Complacency is the dread enemy of the soul, and a progressive sleepy-sickness is the 'paralysis of many a hopeful Christian life. Let such thoughts disturb us so that before this day is done, we may have looked again with childlike simplicity into the face of our God. Is it alright between you and God? Lord, suffer us not to stray.

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37:1-11

These sweet verses scarcely need comment, They bring their own quietness to the soul, and a great sense of well-being as we rest in God's own tranquility. Fret not: That is God's command. If you are walking life's way alone, then you have good cause to be worried; but if you have this God for your shield and companion, why should you fret? We talk often about the cost of consecration, and it cannot be denied. But that is only part of the story. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, and set ourselves to do His will no matter its cost, we find that the desires of our hearts are being satisfied. Hast thou not seen how thy heart's wishes have been granted in what He ordaineth. You have cried to the Lord for many things which He refused to give you: are you not glad now! Other things, have become yours now; and can you not see that God's timing is by far the best: 'Take all the impulses of your desires and affections and rest with them in the Lord, waiting patiently until He clears the

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clouds of uncertainty and causes the pleasurable sunshine of His will to be known. You will easily recognise it, and your heart will swell in gratitude to Him who has done all things well.

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37:12-20

Back comes the Psalmist to one of his constant themes. The wicked are prospering, but their triumph is short lived. Be confident in this: the longer wickedness continues with impunity, the surer is its downfall and judgment. You will always be hurt by the virulence of evil men but you must never be afraid of it. Consider v.13, and remember that evil is essentially weak, for it is subservient to the will of God, and is allowed only in as far as it will serve God's purpose. There are times when things go ill with us because we are not right with God. There are other times, as it was with Job, that things are a veritable sea of wrath boiling around us simply because we are right where God wants us to be and the instruments of His victory in unseen spiritual realms. This is the day of battle, and God allows evil to go its full length so that its discomfiture will be radical when He finally brings its little day to an end. Fret not. The Devil hath come down having great wrath because he knoweth he hath but a short time. (Rev.12:12) God has plenty time. He created it for His use.

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37:21-31

It sometimes seems as if the world is based on injustice when you see the prosperity of some and the persecution of others. But appearances are deceptive, and we must learn to take a long view of things. This man tells us that such as are blessed of the Lord shall inherit the earth, whilst all others shall be cut off. That is very final: painfully final. No one likes to take a back seat, nor to feel that they are swiftly fading and no longer of use or significance. That is part of the treasure of belonging to God. Since you are part of His purposes, you are important for all of time and eternity. All along the line your steps are ordered of God. You are not yet perfect, and you will have your falls which will bruise you, and sometimes leave a mark that will never fade. But, when you do fall, it will be none other than the hand of God Himself that will lift you up again. He will put heart into you, with His encouraging forgiveness, and you will find more and more that the law of the Lord is in your heart, not as stern strictures, but as the responsiveness of love to One who first loved you.

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37:32-40

The Psalm comes to an end with a final contrasting of retribution and recompense to the righteous and the wicked. v.32 -33 tell of malice defeated, for God will, on earth, before men's faces, vindicate His own servants. Some of course are so perverted that they will not see it, in spite of all evidence. But the righteous man shall see that it is not mere coincidence, and shall recognise the hand of his God and be comforted. (34) We all know of wicked men and women who gradually increased in power until we feared them; and Lo, they passed away, and we remained. They were forgotten: the final humiliation of pride. But the end of the righteous man is peace: not only peace in his heart in the midst of strife: but peace in the knowledge that in spite of all the slights and contempt of men, to say nothing of their persecution and hurt, they have fruit to show for their lives - fruit that will remain long after they are dead and gone. What a bulwark against doubts and fears, to have something to show for our life. Jesus said, he that abideth in me.....bringeth forth much fruit.

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This is one of the great Penitential Psalms. "Tortured by pain of body and anguish of mind, deserted by his friends, mocked and menaced by his enemies, the Psalmist lays his cause before God. In his sufferings he recognises the merited punishment of his sin: he submits to the insults of his enemies with a nook resignation which is a distinguishing feature of the Psalm., For the most part he simply pleads the extremity of his plight as an argument to move God's compassion: only at the opening and close does he directly ask for relief (v.1, 21, 22.), and at the beginning of each 'division (v.9,15) addresses God with words of faith and hope". (Kirkpatrick) This is not merely a cry; it is a cry to God. He speaks of my God. He is not mourning or complaining against his misery, which he recognises as righteous and deserved. He is repenting of his sin, for it weighs heavily on his

soul. It will be a good day for us whoa we can pray like this, and learn to cry from out of the depths to the God with whom there is forgiveness that He may be feared.

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38

Since our thoughts of both sin and repentance are generally shallow we road this heart cry again. There are two practical lessons, and the first is that sin has a price. In the believer as well as the unbeliever sin disturbs, distracts, disintegrates and destroys. You simply cannot tamper with it at all. At times you feel you have got away with it, but inevitably and relentlessly your sin finds you out. It is cumulative in its effect, and its fruit is distress that can become so deep that your very health is affected. Compare in this respect, 3John, 2. But sin has more than mere natural consequences. It carries with it the definite displeasure of God. He judges sin. His hand is heavy on the man who sins, whoever he be. He rebukes and chastens by varied means all who transgress His laws, and it is here that we find the basic difference in men. Some are sullen and rebellious in their sin, caring not. Others have the hearts of prodigals and are sick of their sin, desiring only to return to their father's house. Here is a lesson in how to deal with souls. Whenever you see the genuine beginnings of repentance, fly to meet the returning sinner, and be prodigal in your love and welcome. But be sure you are not being taken in!

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39

This is a sequel to the previous Psalm. The circumstances of ill health and distress are basically the same, although the immediate pressing crisis is now over. The man ponders his life, resolving to meet temptation with silence. But no man can do that, and he finds emotion burning within him, almost consuming his being, until he is forced to speak to God and express his heart's longing. It is in this speech that he finds relief, confessing that he had kept silence because God was the author of his distress. But God does not send such trial to men merely to make them suffer, but to make them ask questions of themselves and of Him as to the cause. Then, when the heart is awakened to the interpretation of its experiences, it is drawn to God in whom there is both forgiveness and restoration. God does not want resignation, but willing submission and co-operation. That alone delivers the Christian from morbid preoccupation with sin, and equally morbid preoccupation with holiness, and leads him into a healthy, balanced life. To be a stranger with God, is desolation indeed. To be friends with God is life and peace and hope.

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39

Out of his difficult situation the Psalmist asked some very basic things of God, and we do well to follow suit. Not many of us are realistic enough to face the facts of life as this man does. Make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days what it is, that I nay know how little time I have. The way life flashes past is quite alarming. There are so many things we meal; to do, but we never seem to get round to them. We know that much of our life is vain and empty, and we say we desire something far more real and lasting, but somehow it seems to be always waiting for our attention and never getting it. Then we discover that life has sped away, and we are hovering, on the brink of eternity, and still we have not got down to this business of the salvation of our souls, and it is too late. How we plan for old age, that may never come. How we ignore our eternal destiny which must come. Thu days mid years are passing; you are passing with thou. What is your life and hope? David knows the answer: his hope is in the Lord, and since his treasure is there, so is his heart. Dust to dust and ashes to ashes still remain to be the end as men reckon end. But faith adds - in the sure and certain hope of resurrection unto life that is eternal. Believest thou this?

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40:1-5

How we love to sing these words on a Sunday, for this is exactly what the Lord is always doing. He puts a new song into our mouth. Experience after experience brings us to the sane point, that of praising God for His goodness. Mind you, one of the hardest things we are over asked to do is to wait upon God: waiting for Him to make His way plain and clear. But when Bo deer, and we see the purpose of the waiting and the perfection the

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plan, we sing unto the Lord a new song. It is always now, for the ways of God are fascinating with their novelty and pleasure. When you begin to realise that you are no longer the wandering uncertain creature you used to be, but a person with a purpose and function in life; when you sense the solidity of God's designs in you and through you, you simply cannot help singing. You can never count the goodness's of God, they are too many. But your heart will be so full of them that people will take notice, and know that you belong to God. That may well be the beginning of their conversion. To think that anyone is converted through a life that you are enjoying immensely, is so wonderful, you begin to sing again. There is no end to it. It gets better all along the line. Hallelujah.

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40:6-11

It is all very well to speak of God's goodness's and to sing His praises, but with far too many of us religion stops there. God looks for a response from those whose lives He has lifted and transformed, and He will not be impressed by, nor content with, a spate of religious words however evangelical; nor with the palaver of religious activities whether formal or fervent. He looks for devotion and obedience: not the obedience determined by duty or acceptance, but that which comes in glad, unstinted flow from hearts stirred to love. This love to God has far more to do with down to earth, disturbing obedience than nice religious feelings, (cf. Lk. 6:46, Ja. 14:15). This is all very private between a man and his God, but more is required and the Psalmist testifies that he has not concealed his convictions as he has worked and spoken with men. Some folk might be tremendously surprised if they know you went to Church on a Sunday: they would never have guessed it from your behaviour. Does this mean we are to plague people with our witnessing? NO! But if the law of your God is in the midst of your heart, and if your life flows from there, you will be recognisable. If your religion can in fact be hid, there is something wrong with it!

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40:12-17

Those who have suffered most can best sing the praises of their God, and they do so continually. The mournful, whining complainers seldom know much about real discipleship nor real delight. The self-centred heart murmurs and complains in difficulty, but the heart of faith waits for God to explain and direct, and when in due season deliverance comes, it is accompanied by a song. These verses tell us that the life of a saint and servant of God has always two strands. Suffering and singing; weeping and rejoicing go together. How could it be otherwise when the world, the flesh and the Devil conspire to fight against all that is good. David speaks of his own sins pursuing him like an avenging Fate seeking to punish him. His enemies gloat in malicious glee at his misfortune. What does it all mean? Has he set his heart on God for nought? After all his years of service in faithfulness and suffering, is he to be left to disintegrate and die in disgrace? Are these the ways of God with His servants? Never! What a slight on God even to suggest it. The mockers will get their deserts. God will see to that! But as for His servants, the Lord will take thought for them, and the clouds they so much dread will prove to be big with mercy and blessing. Wait I say on the Lord.

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There can be no deeper hurt nor more bitter anguish and sorrow than that inflicted by one who has been a close friend and trusted confidant. When you have cared for, worked for, and ministered to a fellow beyond all the requirements of duty, only to find that in your own hour of distress and need he casts you aside in contempt, you have tasted with the Lord Himself the lash of a Judas kiss. This is David's lot here at the time immediately preceding Absalom's rebellion. The king had been ill, and his physical weakness had unnerved him, leaving him so wearied and worn that although he was aware of the impending trouble, he could not muster the energy and drive to deal with it before it broke forth. David feels it is all his own fault because of his sins, and that; adds to the torment. Is all lost? To his wonder, David discovered it was not, and learned two different things, namely the tenderness and strength of his God, Look at v.3. The Lord will uphold or support him when he languishes. God himself will care for him with the tender touch of a nurse. When David stretches out his hand in the hour of distress he finds it grasped by God. O Love, that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee.

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There are many comforts in this sore Psalm for it is true to life. We see in it how quickly and sadistically people place the wrong interpretation on a situation. As in the case of Job people said David was being punished by God through this illness and they eagerly, lusted for his death which would mean his removal from their community. They hated him, and refused to recognise him as the servant of God because they were jealous of him and his place in God's work. The more David became a man after God's own heart the more he was rejected and reviled, and that is something that has not changed. When you dislike someone, envy their unction and authoritative word, and resent their disturbing challenge to your easy comfortable way of life, you become quick to unearth their sins and use them as a shield to divert the sword of truth from your proud, self-willed life. But, there is something you cannot influence, and that is the determined purpose of God for His work and His men. Let the months and years go past, and let God's men be vindicated and their foes put to shame. Better be popular with the everlasting God than with puny men who return to the dust from whence they came.

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42:1-5

This Psalm, and the next form one complete poem divided into three parts each ending with a similar refrain. The man of God is being taunted by godless enemies with the question 'Where is your God?'. But that is not a question for men to ask nor answer, for the living God is not bound to ask permission of men to act, nor is He obliged to give an account of all His doings. But God is there, everywhere, watching, waiting, working, in Parliaments, White Houses, Kremains and secret conclaves of wickedness ordering all things according to His own perfect will. You may not have the joyous fellowship with the saints that was once your delight: you may have tears and perplexing valleys to endure: your heart may cry out as the boasts bray piteously for water in time of drought. If only God would come to you to explain if not to alleviate you could bear it. Stop! Why art thou cast down? Has God died? Have His plans for your life been lost or thwarted? Shall tin Devil have the last word and fill the world with his fiendish cackling laughter to make God the laughing-stock of His own creation? Why art thou cast down? Why indeed!

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42:6-11

This man is at it twain and his feelings plunge him-into the depths, yet not without excuse for it seems that God is sending him misfortune after misfortune until he feels quite overwhelmed and well-nigh swept away. Then with the fatal morbidity of human nature, encouraged by the lies of the Devil, he concludes that this is judgment; that he, the servant of God for many days, honoured, blessed, vindicated times without number, has been cast off. 'Way hast thou forgotten me?' he bleats piteously. What a silly question: God does not forget: nor does He change His mind as we do. Ah, but you say, life for me is as a sword piercing my soul and the rebuke is well-nigh breaking my heart. I am finished; done for; a failure, broken in health and heart. It cannot be so, else men could slander God and say He was a hard task-master. They would say God was not good for men, and that faith in Him broke men and made them sickly instead of strong and healthy. What blasphemy. Hope thou in God, for He is your health and salvation.

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How we love to sing these words and how often we quote them from the pulpit. Let them be your song for today and if it will not be too much for your neighbours let your voice give vent to the full assurance of your heart so that you and they may know you have a real and living God in whom you trust. God's ways are past finding out, yet they are ways of light and truth. The darkest cloud gives way to the light of His smile, and in every situation there is a word from out of His word. This is the place of the Bible in your life, and the neglect of it is the reason why you are so often in miserable perplexity about yourself and the future. God is not perverse enough to delight in your uncertainty. After all you are more use to Him when you know what you are doing. Ask Him to guide you, to tell you the answer to your problem. Even if in His wisdom, and because you are not in a

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condition to bear the pleasures and responsibilities of the answer, He causes you to wait, do so in faith and not in impatience. Don't bicker at God, pestering Him with demands for permission. Remember that He sometimes grants requests and sends lean-ness to the soul. (Ps.106:15) Does He refuse permission? Does He say no? Does He take away a treasured though groundless hope? Still trust in God. He knows best, and His choices are best in pleasure and profit!

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44:1-8

This is not so much a personal Psalm as one applying to the fellowship and the nation and it consists of an appeal to God in time of disaster and humiliation. When the speaker refers to the: great days of the past, when God was known and manifested His power in works of might and mercy, we cannot but think of our own nation and national Church. Our fathers knew the power of God in and through them in a way that our generation has not known. We too have read and heard of what Scotland knew in past days, and we thank God for our heritage. It was spiritual conviction that was the moral backbone of our land, and it is the remnant of such graces wrought by the hand of God that has preserved us to this day. But we cannot live on our fathers' spiritual capital any longer. God worked. and fought for them, and the enemies of Scotland were driven cut by the power and authority of God's own Word. But now, there is no vision of that Word, the people cast off restraint, and the Church fears to thunder warnings of judgment and fails to summon the nation to repentance. We shall not know the power, of the God of our fathers until we fear Him and obey Him as they did. But what if we as a Church and nation have sinned away our day of grace? God will deliver us as a nation to the fruits of our disregarding of His Law and Ten Commandments. We must identify ourselves with the sinful nation as the prophets did, and confessing our national sins call the people to repentance. This is Scotland's only hope.

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44:9-26

The heart and true application of the Psalm is in v.17-18 and teaches us that the people of God are often called to suffer for reasons quite unknown to themselves. The work of God is always done by way of a Cross of pain, and to share in His work is to share in His agony of suffering that leads to redemption. cf.2 Cor.4:8-12. But this must never dishearten, for it is from this very Psalm that Paul quotes Rom.8:36, telling us that no power or force, human or demonic, has the power to separate us from the love of God and His purposes for our lives and His glory. Arise O Lord, is a prayer that must always be in our hearts. Nevertheless we apply the Psalm as we did yesterday. No longer can we say in this land and Church that we have not forgotten God nor His way. We have taken unto us in Church and Nation the gads of pleasure and worldliness, and there are more dances in our buildings than prayer meetings. But we have not done so with impunity. The unbelieving world scorns us, and rightly so, for we have lost our moral message and spiritual conviction. Why; only a tiny percentage of members of the national Church would dream of going to Church twice a Sunday. Where are the rest? God knows: What will the result be? Turn to 2 Chronicles 7: 19-22, think of all the Churches closed down and pulled down, and many that will yet suffer such a fate, and then do some realistic thinking!

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The title tells us this is a song celebrating a marriage, and the first verse tells that the heart of the writer is bubbling over, as with great eagerness he tells of the beauties and graces of the King. From earliest times this Psalm has been recognised as a Messianic Psalm, and the King it extolls is Jesus. Go right through the verses pondering every virtue and grace spoken of, then let your mind and heart this day be filled with thoughts of Jesus. That will please God: it will also sweeten your life. Here is the analysis of the Psalm given by Dr. G. C. Morgan: His beauty and grace of character v.2. His equipment and purpose in conflict v.3-4. His power in conflict v.5. His victory and consequent enthronement and glory v.6-8. His consort, her devotion, her beauty, her companion's v.9-15. His seed royal reigning in the earth v.16. His complete triumph v.17. The Psalmist is seeing the King in all His beauty and his heart is won and brought into captivity. This is the mark of true conversion when it is with us as it was with the Psalmist and. the Apostle Paul, that we are blind to all else save Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

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God Himself is our refuge and He puts strength into us no matter the immediate circumstances of life. The Psalmist pictures the most terrible convulsions of earthquake and yet says he will not be moved: indeed he claims he is strolling by a river of quietness and unspeakable peace. God is awfully real to this man who seems to know Him very well. No Christian need fear the howling, growling nations so like to a pack of ravening wolves, for God, our God, is seen here reigning over all, commanding the tumult to cease and declaring His determination to be exalted. This is what we must learn to see in the midst of the brutality of the massed forces of evil, and to see it is to be at peace. Faith does not close its eyes to facts. It looks hard at the swiftly spreading evil of Communism, for example, and sees it as only another instrument in the armoury of God as He works His sovereign will amongst the nations. God is our refuge indeed.

Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?

Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.

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Most of us will have time enough on a Sunday to consider our lives in relation to the closing word of this Psalm. It is a command: Be still, and know that I am God: and we must confess that not only is this a very hard thing to do, it is the thing in our Christian lives that is most neglected. We are all far too busy with far too many things, and if the truth be told some of us are so occupied with what we call Christian work and service that there is neither room nor time for God in our lives. Be quite sure of this, God will not be content to trail along after you in your frenzied rush of meetings and activities; nor will you ever get to know the deep delights of God in such a way; nor will you ever grow to be a fruitful servant of God. Beware the danger of an over-active life. Restless souls need to learn from the Bible, which they are so busy preaching that they have not time to read, that God is unhurried in His ways. Be still, for that is the only way of knowing God, and that knowledge is the fountain of power for life and service. Restless activity long continued is nothing other than spiritual self-destruction. Now, re-plan this coming week, and give God His place.

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The three Psalms 46-48 form a trilogy. In the first God is a refuge; in this He is a Ruler; in the last He is the Resource or Protector of His people. Each of the three is in some form a Psalm of praise. Here the heart rises as we remember that God is not only ruler and governor of His own people, but of all the nations and peoples of the earth. He is a big God, and He is on our side. Little wonder the Apostle cries aloud in exultant challenge in Romans 8:31 - If God be for us, who dare set themselves against us. You would be surprised at the number who are foolish enough to try. They fail to see that behind the despised servants there stands the living God Himself. They do not understand that those who serve God are not planning and changing and preaching according to their own whims or choices. God shall choose for us, (v.4) and whatever He delivers to us as our charge we will do in spite of men or devils (and the two may have more in cannon than at first appears). When you understand this (7) you will sing praises.

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"In the crisis of her uttermost peril Jehovah has proved Himself the protector of Zion (1-8): and the citizens of the rescued city are bidden to deepen their sense of His mercy by reflecting on the marvelousness of the deliverance vouchsafed to them (9-14)." (Kirkpatrick) The singer tells of the beauty and security of that city of Zion which is protected by the presence of God. Perhaps Hymn 206, Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion city of our God, will help us to taste the strong security and abiding confidence of every work of God, and those who are part of it. Mark well the bulwarks and think well of the value God sets on that which is as the apple of His eye, for He will not deal lightly with those who tamper to hurt it. God's right hand is full of righteousness (10). The right hand is the emblem of God's power. There can be no breakdown of His ability to secure for His

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people p11 things that are right and good. He is a strong God, altogether to be trusted and feared, and to those who love Him and obey Him there is the delight of ever fresh discoveries of all His loving kindnesses. This indeed is our God; we shall be glad and rejoice in His presence.

(Isa. 25: 9).

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What shall it profit a man if he spend the whole of his earthly life working and striving to gain wealth and position? The answer is nothing; for he not only loses his soul in the process, he leaves all his wealth behind for he can't take it with him when he dies. But men still do it, and so do their children after them. Read v.10-13 and acknowledge just how great a fool you may be. What have you got in this world that you are sure of? List your assets and liabilities and hear the word that says, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee! What then? You say there is always heaven. True: but what makes you think you will enter there, where nought that defileth can ever enter in? Have you no sins to bar you from acceptance? The redemption of the soul is costly, and no man can pay the price for himself strive he ever so much. No man, priest or layman can pay the price for another. There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin save Jesus, and only those who tear all their self-righteousness to shreds, stop all their vain works to justify themselves before God, and take the place of the humble penitent sinner resting on Jesus as their own personal saviour can die in peace. 111 funerals are not the same. With some there is hope. Please God your faith unto salvation is so sure and obvious that your minister will have no doubts as to your destiny.

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50:1-6

Here is a word that we must begin to take seriously when the course of world history seems to be gathering itself up in preparation for the end. There is no sentimental thought about the brotherhood of man, for man's inhumanity to man increases. There is no indication of an easy slipping away of this dark world and an ushering in of peace. Rather there is a dread picture of conflict, tumult and fire as God comes to judge the nations. The previous Psalm is a good introduction to this message. It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the Judgment. Let us not close our eyes to the facts of the Word of God. Judgment must come: and it is coming, for God hath prepared His throne, and the books are to be opened. This is the preaching that Scotland must yet hear if she is to be saved. This is the kind our pulpits have refused to give because ministers have feared men more than God. This is the absent note from far too much Gospel preaching, and as a result men are heedless, living as fancy chooses having no thought of consequences. If you have a heart of concern for Scotland pray for a race of fearless preachers of judgment unto conviction of sin, and when God begins to send such prophets be sure you are found with them in loyalty and in prayer.

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50:7-15

God now speaks to His own people, those who claim His name and call themselves Christians, and He testifies against them because of the manifest failure of their lives. They have imagined that their duty to God was fulfilled in a routine of formal attendance and ceremonial sacrifices which they performed with regularity. In our language, they would have a dedication service. But God is not interested in performances of any kind, especially empty ones which mean nothing in themselves and produce nothing by way of more radical and realistic religion. God refuses to come down to such a tawdry level, for it would be a denial of the dignity of His person. Ponder v.12 well and link it with the word of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount concerning casting your pearls before swine. (Matt.7:6) What God requires of man, as his duty, is the sacrifice of the heart, expressed in sincere thanksgiving and loyal trust and obedience. Pay your vows. Better not to vow, than vow and not pay. (Eccles.5:1-6) Better checkup on your life. God is not taken in by your words; nor are men in the long run.

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50:16-23

Having spoken of the first great section of the Ten Commandments, our duty toward God, the Psalm now speaks sternly to those who, though apparently religious, sin against their fellows. We are far too prone to forget the Law of God, and need to read and learn the Commandments as our fathers did. They do not express sentiment or suggestion; they are commands - THOU SHALT, THOU SHALT NOT - and God means it. Go back to Exodus 20, read all ten of God's unchanging laws, and lay them to heart as v.22 of the Psalm exhorts. The burden of this half of the Psalm is our sinning against our brother, which is ultimately sin against God. God takes it all very seriously and promises He will take a dealing with those concerned. Note how great a part gossip and malicious ill-tempered criticism play in this condemnation. 'God is always near me, hearing what I say.....Not a look or word or thought, but God knows it all'. We must learn that God means business, and when we are disposed to Him in like manner and reality, then we shall indeed see the salvation of God and our praises will begin to have worth.

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This is a Psalm for those who have sinned and fallen. It combines a sense of deepest guilt and shame with profound repentance. It belongs to the time in David's life when the prophet of God brought home to his heart the guilt of his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah. (2 Sam. 12) The man of God had been out of the will of God, dawdling and lounging in indolence when he should have been in the thick of God's battle. In his out of sorts condition, temptation when presented grasped him with fatal attraction, and in a moment of decision he became involved in a tangle that nearly destroyed his life, let alone his usefulness to God. Where was David's reason and sanity? What folly made him prepared to barter a life of holy service for a moment's satisfaction of desire? We say it was the work of the Devil, and that is true, for the enemy will never miss an opportunity like this. But it was David's own doing, for in all probability there had been a spell of restless jibing at God's yoke, or a growth of complacency, or a conscious trifling with things and thoughts he knew full well were not good for him. There are many Christians called David, and please God this word today will be sufficiently sharp and clear to stop many foolish moves and turn many steps back to God.

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51

We dare not divide this heart-cry into sections even for study. This man knows that his sin has brought his whole life to the razor edge of crisis. The alternatives are to be left with the fact and fruit of his sin as he fully deserves, or to be forgiven, cleansed and restored by the mercy of God. David must have got a terrible fright, for his prayer is real and well-nigh desperate in its honesty. He prays that his sin of rebellion against God may be blotted out from the record; that the iniquity, perversion and pollution of his heart be washed, and the word indicates being rubbed, kneaded, beaten, or disciplined. No method is considered too severe if only he be cleansed from this sin that had brought ruin to his life, David is not merely sorry for himself because of the pain sin had brought him - that is usually as far as we get - he sees the enormity of his deed in the words 'Against Thee, have I sinned'. It was the God who had redeemed him, saved him, lifted him, made a man of him that he had mocked and dishonoured. Where would the Davids of this world be but for the grace of God? Think, my brother and sister, how far astray you might go, how deeply you might sink, how useless and futile and barren your life might be but for the God you trifle with and make use of when fancy stirs. Ponder deeply, and ask Him to take away your love of sinning. Ask Him to let you see what sin is and does, so that, fearing it, you will allow God to take it from you and you from it.

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51

One last day in this mine of grace. David knew that he was God's man, and that there was a lifetime of service before him. Now it was this usefulness to God and consequent reward to himself that David was in danger of forfeiting. No real Christian, having been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ and born again of His Spirit can ever be lost eternally. But, there are Christians who, through their own wrong choices in life, (often the choice of the wrong life-partner) are living God's second best. Can there be any more dread or agonising existence than

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that of living for years and years with the thought of what you might have been and done in the service of God? You would look on others whose service was touched by the sanctifying fire of the Holy Spirit and know that it might have been so with you: You may still go to Church, and to prayer meetings, and to teach in Sunday School, but!! Now read v.11-13. There is mercy with God. Cast yourself at His feet with Ire more but delay and ask Him to restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten. (Joel 2:25) 'So shall my walk be close with God, calm and serene my frame. So purer light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb'. So let it be!

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The title of the Psalm seems to fix the context and relate the message to the double-dealing of Doeg, the Edomite, who by recounting facts that were in themselves quite true, yet confirmed suspicion and hatred in the mind of King Saul. (1 Sam. 21-22). This is a type of devilish work that we are well acquainted with: the tone of voice, the hidden innuendo and the seed of doubt and mistrust is sown, and some character is maligned and some friendship broken. But such is not done with impunity. The Psalmist directly challenges the twister, dragging him out into the open naming him and exposing him, and his fate is foretold. Then with awe the righteous contemplate his fall, and rejoice over the judgment of the self-confident braggart, all the while contrasting the safety and prosperity of the man who waits upon God. Men must never be allowed so to presume on Christian grace that they confuse it with weakness. There is a time to turn the other cheek and there is a time to say 'enough'. Is this a denial of Christian love and the sentiments of the Sermon on the Mount? (The sermon was preached by the same Jesus who preached Matthew.23) No, it is the realism of God and God's servants who recognise the fundamental difference between good and evil. One is right and the other wrong, and must be dealt with accordingly.

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This is almost a word for word repetition of Psalm 14 with the exception of v.5, which seems to indicate an adaptation of the Psalm to -apply to enemies outside Israel, in this case the armies of Sennacherib, encamped against Jerusalem in Isaiah 37:6-7. God sent a blast, or put a spirit into them so that they departed without laying hands on God's people. Is it not the case that very often we become possessed with fear where in fact no cause for fear is? This dread panic that can lay hold on us so suddenly and paralyse us with nervous tension, keeping us from sleep, and so reducing our efficiency in service is a favourite work of Satan. He is a liar. He tells us all is lost: flight is the only possibility; we believe his lies and terror casts us down. Then is the time to stand still and see the salvation of God in your situation. Don't dash around mentally or physically. Stop. Stop. Wait. Where is God in all this? What is He saying in His still small voice of calm? Can your God want you to be disintegrated in nerve and emotion? Through and through the Bible, God's word to His own children is 'Fear not'. God covenants to keep the feet of His saints. (1 Sam.2:9) He is well able to do it and has turned our captivity more than once.

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David is persecuted and his hiding place is basely betrayed to the enemy. He first prays for help, then declares that help will be forthcoming. V.4 is the heart. It says that God is his helper, which is truth indeed. It also says that the Sovereign Lord is among them that uphold his soul. Some say that this should be rendered - "The Lord is the upholder of my soul," or - "It is the Lord that upholds my soul." That of course is quite true, but here David is speaking of his friends, recognising their human help and ministrations as they stand by his side in loyalty, and he says that it is the Lord who has moved them to be such shelters and comforts to him. Think of David's friend Jonathan, who, in time of need, went to David and strengthened his hand in the Lord (1 Sam.23:16). God works through our friends, but so does Satan. Some servants of God have friends like Job's miserable comforters, who add to the burden by their ill-considered words and actions. Some have friends who give them pain and disappointment. Some have friends who, being themselves close to God, are the helpers and upholders of their companions in the midst of battle. See that you are the right kind.

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This is another Psalm that cannot be divided, for its sorrows and sweetness set each other off in a way that tears at the heart and prepares one to understand and be comforted by v.22. The movement of the poem is from despair, through hurt and indignation, to the peace of trust. We can sense here something of the heart of Jesus with regard to Judas. The faithlessness of trusted friends is an agony quite unique, and is part and parcel of the life and experience of all who follow the Saviour in work of redemption. The beauty of expression in v.6-7 is poignant and pathetic. The bruised heart begins to bleed in v.12-14, and the sword is twisted in the wound by remembrance in v.20-21. There is but one comfort for this man. It is in the God of all comfort and consolation, who, although He does not remove the burden, (that might mean removing from life the faithless friend and David would not desire that, for he still loves) sustains him in it. It is as if God is pictured encircling the man with His arms, and placing His own shoulder under the load. In this way God enables us to bear the pressures of life and through them makes our service more perfect.

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David fled in desperation from one set of circumstances and found himself in a worse plight, in the hands of the Philistines, humiliated to the extent of feigning madness to preserve his life. His enemies were not deceived and plagued him in every way, seeking his destruction. But David had a God who knew him; who knew all his wanderings and tears, and as he begins to think of this God he finds solace. In v.3-4 we find a succession of thoughts. When I am afraid....I will trust....I will not fear. Fear was there, but so was faith: and faith conquered because it thought and reasoned and rested. "The heart of man is frail at its strongest, and there are hours in which the forces against us inevitably suggest that sense of weakness, and thus create fear. In such hours let us exercise our reasoning powers to the full, for that is the true activity of faith." (Morgan.) God is for me, says David. It did not look like it at the time, but then appearances can be very deceptive. Men were yet to be forced by weight of evidence to recognise it was so. They might never confess it; but they knew it. And after all, David never needed their empty acknowledgments. He had God's own approval.

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This man's religion is very much a part of daily experience, and his faith in God is almost matter of fact. His God is One who does things for him (2). There is a tremendous depth of confidence in David for he sees that the men who deride and denounce him are in fact doing to God and not merely to His servant. Since that is so, lest men think God is unwilling to 'save and deliver His servant, God must act from heaven in ?????????????? fashion. Then with the fascinating originality and unexpectedness we are learning to expect from Him, God so turns the tables that evil opponents fall into the pit they have dug for David. It takes a very clever man to outwit God, and none have yet proved themselves capable, even with the help of the Devil. We must learn to watch the machinations of evil men with calm unconcern, knowing that eventually, when they have served the purpose for which they were permitted, God will puff with His breath and they shall be swept away in confusion. There is neither stability nor permanence in the service of the Devil. But the man whose heart is fixed upon God, is a man who knows the praise and singing that rises like the lark into the brightness and sunshine of the heavens.

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This is a Psalm that faces up to the fact of the wickedness of men in this world, their impending destruction at the hands of God, and the abiding principle of all life, namely that there is a reward for righteousness because God is the Judge of all the earth. The Word denounces all who govern by ways of wickedness, speaking with passion as did the prophets of old. Then comes a radical appeal to God to sweep away false judges whose government adds to the misery of humanity. Finally the Psalmist declares his conviction that God will do just this. There is nothing here of misguided pacifism nor sentimental unilateral disarmament in the face of the enemy. It is far more radical and realistic, believing that in and through the stern forces at work in the world,

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God is bringing His judgments of justice to bear amongst men. We have every cause to believe that we live in a generation of judgment. As a nation we have so sinned away our days of grace and opportunity that we may be too far gone for God to lift His hand to deliver us, leaving us to fall under the hand of the oppressor. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? If there be a righteous remnant in the nation and Church let them begin to pray for national repentance, encouraged by the record of the prophet Jonah who, having declared that yet forty days and Nineveh would be overthrown, witnessed repentance among the people from the greatest to the least. God is a God that judgeth the earth!

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59:1-9

Here is another prayer for deliverance from virulent enemies who threaten the Psalmist's life. There are many strong and seemingly merciless words in it, but before we condemn them as Christian and not to be compared with the gentler tones of Jesus, remember that they are spoken against those who had, manifested a long continued, ever increasing bitterness of hatred and opposition to all that was the work of God. They fastened on the man's sins as an excuse for their malicious words and deeds, but the servant of God denies their lies in v.3-4. They act as they do because in spite of all their protestations to the contrary, they are enemies of God and of His Anointed. They have neither part nor lot in all the work of the Lord, therefore the prayer of v.5 is both necessary and right, not merely on the grounds of personal deliverance, but for the protection of the work of God. This is Christian warfare in which there will be many sore wounds. We must not shrink in the evil day, but, being girded with the whole armour of God, first for safety then for attack, we must stand, and having done all still stand. And we will!

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59:10-17

Having described the scornful and contemptuous godlessness of his adversaries, the Psalmist now prays from the strong tower of his confidence in God that these men and women may be humbled though not utterly destroyed, and maybe left for an example, until their own sin proves their ruin, and their final disappearance demonstrates the sovereignty and justice of God. It takes faith to live like this, and such faith is not easily come by. This may explain some of God's dealings with us, as He prepares us for battles and sore persecutions which are yet to come. Now, we must neither fear nor shrink from such a thought, for we shall never be cast into the furnace of fire alone. God Himself will be there, and men shall behold to their utter amazement that we come out of it with surer faith and stronger hope than ever. This will so baffle them that they will simply seethe with indignation, yet the man of God will still sing quietly, for in the midst of all this trouble God will grow more real and precious to him. This is something to be proved.

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This is a post-mortem on a defeat that Israel suffered, and the reason for defeat is in v.1. They had sinned, and by their sin forfeited God's pleasure and power. Apply this to personal life, root out the cause in true repentance and you will know the renewed blessing of God. God will not play games where sin is involved and where His work and honour is at stake. Over and over again it is recorded in the Old Testament that when Israel broke faith with God they suffered defeat at the hands of their enemies. That principle abides. We may try n11 manner of devices to further our work, but if God is not pleased with us, they will all come to naught. If God is pleased, we shall not need the fancy schemes, for His Word will be with power and His work will advance. Take much heed to the word of our Lord: 'Without Me, ye can do nothing'. Make sure He is there. If we fail, the disgrace is not only ours, but our God's. We dare not shame His Holy Name, who has done so much for us.

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This is the Psalm with which we concluded our studies in the Record of June, 1961 and we return to it because of the pertinence of its message and its deep lesson to the people of God. The title refers to the wars of 2 Samuel 8: 13ff. While David was conquering in the North, his armies were suffering serious reverses in the

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South by Edom. The whole Kingdom might well be endangered and the Psalm makes plain that the root cause was that God was displeased with His own people and as a consequence confounded them and brought barrenness to their workings. God is not obliged to prosper all that is done by those who profess and work in His name. When carefully arranged and advertised meetings fail to bring forth the specific fruit for which they were convened we must rightly question if these meetings were ever desired by God. Give great thought to v.3 and consider the life of the Church in the light of it. In many ages God has withdrawn His blessing and unction in order that His people might be separated from carnal lustings which do nothing but dishonour His name. The time is ripe for realistic as opposed to sentimental thinking, for the God who did not go with us did so that He might more effectually bring us into a true city.

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It has been conjectured that David wrote this Psalm when he was an exile and far away from Jerusalem as a result of the rebellion of Absalom. David's own weakness was largely responsible for the situation and with everything pressing in on him he was dispirited. But over against himself, with all his awareness of weakness and limitation, David places the Rock that is God, a high, strong, stable and sure refuge. It is there alone that he is safe from the treacherous weakness of his own personality and temptations, and David knows that God is not just someone to be called upon when something is needed.' He is a God with whom we must dwell day by day and no exercise is so effectual in maintaining this bond of fellowship as that of remembering the goodness of this same God in earlier days. A Christian's sinning is one of the wonders of the world. We know the hurt we have brought to heart and home; the shame and distress out of which the Lord brought us safely, and yet we do it again, the very same things. Lord, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

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In the previous Psalm the man cries to God his rock from a great sense of the insufficiency of self and now he declares that all he needs and desires is to be found only in God. The word only is repeated in verses 2, 5, and 6. This is a word which, although it cannot remove the pang of human loneliness, does prevent the desolation of a sense of 'aloneness', for the fact of the matter is this, that no matter how we shrink from suffering of any kind, in the work of God we do not need any other mortal help at all if the path of God's commandment so requires. We will go it alone if need be, for He only is our salvation. Because of this the Psalmist first says in v.2 that he will not be greatly moved, i.e. it will take a great deal to move him from his willing complicity in God's work. But in v.6 he says categorically that he will not be moved at all. This is the rugged kind of trust of v.8. It is manly and courageous trust, but it has more than at first appears to do with the heart and the feelings. This kind of faith worketh by love to the Lord, and as love generates faith so faith in turn begets love, and to this there is no end, for there is no end to God.

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What we have said above does not imply a life of quietude for the man of God. That will never be as long as there is a devil and devil's men and women. David asks in v.3-4 how long his enemies mean to persist in setting on him. The words indicate threatening and attempted intimidation which are always the tactics of cowardly demons human and otherwise. They use lies to cast God's man down from his dignity or excellency. Their aim is the cruelty of humiliation and they are not above using holy language and protestations to accomplish it. The words in v.4 can be read in an active sense picturing the enemies trying to slay the Psalmist and battering at him like a toppling wall. The truth is that the man is staggering under the blows. Why should we think that God's servants have no sensitivity to the cruelty of men? It hurts. And it must be alleviated somehow, perhaps by you! The Psalmist takes himself to task to be his own helper since no one else- is there to do it. Men are weighed against God and they lose. (v.9) They just don't count. They are non-significant. What a blow to, their pride. Two things are his rest. Power belongs to God alone. So does mercy.. Blessed mixture, and God deals with men one by one.

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A paraphrase of this Psalm is found in Hymn 473 where the poet speaks of the .footsteps of God's grace marked out for the saint along a rough and thorny road. If we were left to choose for ourselves we would not be disposed to choose difficulty and suffering but in all honesty we must confess that it has been in such times that we have learned most of the goodness and mercy of our God. Here in the wilderness David cannot forget the costliness of his life, but the awareness of it fades, if but temporarily, as he holds converse with an unseen but real and personal God. This is the great thing about this God. You can speak to Him, and in doing so speed. up into .a greater and higher world where you see things as they really are, with no doubt as to the end. Then, lest any think this is high spirituality for a few specially sensitive and holy souls, the last three verses bring us back to the blood, sweat and toil of a man in combat with very fleshly foes. This is real religion, and the strong tower for the true man is that he recognises his foes to be God's foes. They hate and hurt the man because they cannot get their claws on God. But God is near.

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The man of God was afraid of being afraid, and in giving voice to this in the first verse he comes to the ;ground of courage. When we fear the foe we are on the verge of defeat for the heart is weakened, but when we take a good square look at the virulence of the enemy and then, fearful lest the evidence of our senses betray us into cowardice, draw deliberately near to God in whom is our trust and confidence, then we are at the secret of courage and the assurance of victory. Let us be quite sure of this: if God leave us, then we go plummeting down to destruction. But, as far as we know our hearts, if we have no known cause of variance with our God then we can trust. Him and face the foe however devilish, be his cunning. Nameless fears and dreads, a vague sense of unrest, and a blanketing cloud of unhappiness with carry a gleam of light are things that the enemy of our souls uses to unnerve and so demolish us and accomplish our removal from the front line of battle. O God, preserve my life from fear of the enemy.

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Examine carefully the description of wicked men and marvel at its blind presumption. v.2-3 Secret counsel and bitter words. v.4 They are not afraid to hurl their venom at God's man. There have always been those who persecuted the prophets of God. They are profane men, incapable of registering any spiritual emotion or truth. They cannot see that some men and some works are sacrosanct, for this reason, that God is with them. It would be to their credit to depart if they do not want to be involved with God, but they stay to persecute and oppose, and they are not afraid. The presumption of wickedness has to be seen and experienced to be believed. Men thumb their noses at the Almighty and think no one knows. (v.5) God knows and so do lots of His ministers. They are deep, that is dyed deep in evil. But God will one day decide He has stood enough and the retribution will begin. Ho will trap them in their own nets and they will lose a tremendous number of their allies, who will be out to save their own skins. Then shall the righteous be glad. It must be so.

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65:1-4

How we love to sing in Church this Psalm of worship and harvest praise. (see v.11.) It is suggested that the historical background is that of the third year spoken of in Isaiah 37:30 when the retreat of the Assyrian enemy left Israel free to till their fields in peace. Their God had given them peace and the people speak their praises. "It is the duty of a grateful people to render thanks to God in the Temple, assembling to pay its vows to the universal Hearer of prayer. The consciousness of manifold sins might deter then from approaching a holy God, were not He Himself graciously ready to purge away their guilt. In the blessings, of which the welcome to His house is the pledge, is to be found man's truest happiness". (Kirkpatrick) The man is aware that God will hear his cry. God will purge away his perversities and evil deeds. God takes the initiative and draws us to Himself, overcoming our reluctance and shame, that He might satisfy us with His goodness. No wonder praise waits, or literally is silent, staggered into dumbness by the goodness of God; then when the -heart is subdued, there breaks forth the anthem of thanksgiving. That is the true pattern of worship.

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65:5-13

This man has a tremendous grasp of the bigness and strength of his God. He is the One who creates and sustains the world, operating on the plane of the forces of nature and on that of international strife. It is indeed a strong consolation to know that the roaring of the nations is as absolutely controlled as-the turbulent elements of nature. It is God who bids the mighty oceans of all kinds keep to their own appointed spheres and limits. cf. Jer.5:22. Now this great God has set His heart upon Israel and the people give testimony to His goodness in blessing them beyond all expectation. Note how the Psalm repeats from v.9 onwards the word 'Thou'. It is God, again and again. He crowns the year of His goodness by adding yet more of His rich bounty and pleasurable blessings. It is little wonder that the man's heart abounds with singing as he pictures the hills and valleys shouting to each other their gladness. Do you see that although the Psalmist looks back to praise, his thoughts are yet pointing forward to days of more and more of God's perfection of goodness? It is absolutely true that the best is yet to be.

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66:1-12

The first half of this Psalm of praise culls on men to look back over the history of God's dealings with men and nations. We are apt to bewail the apparent inaction of God and His reluctance to give demonstration of His powers when we demand it of Him in prayer. The reason is simply that we are so blinded by our own preconceived notions that we cannot recognise God when we see His workings. Come and see the works of God, says v.5. He is not afraid of sudden, mighty intervention to sweep away the proud paradings of men. Think of the Israelites going through the Red Sea dry shod. (6) Think of the sudden shock, fear, terror and destruction of Pharaoh when the waters returned. (2) This God still rules by His power and keeps watch upon the nations. (7) But away all complacency if we rest in false security as God's people. Rend very slowly v.10-12., God will use fire and water to cleanse His own people from dross and carnal self-pleasing. He means business, and His ways are always considered and effectual, for He would bring us to a place of liberty or wealth. This is the real Bible God, not sentimentality.

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66:13-20

The Psalm speaks now with a personal voice for the man has been brought face to face with His God and has seen the facile hypocrisy of much of his religion. Who amongst us has not prayed and vowed with great earnestness when up against it? How often have we said to God so many things we would do and be if only God would get us out of this fix or past this crisis? Well, God is waiting for you to keep your word. There was no need to vow. You could have cried in prayer to a merciful God and He would have heard you. The vows were quite voluntary. Did you mean them then? Do you stand by them now? If so, why the lethargy of spirit that marks you out as a dull heavy-footed disciple? Could v.18 have something to do with it? We must be utterly open with God. Nothing else is any use, for He can see right through us. The open-faced Christian has nothing to fear though he be beset with depressing remembrance of many sins. God will not turn away!

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The metrical version of this Psalm is blessed indeed for it breathes a spirit of great quietness, reverence, worship and intercession. When we behold our fellow mortals in all the pitiful Shallowness of their existence we cannot but long that they should be brought to know the saving health of our God. It is this compassionate longing that is the essence of our prayers of intercession and who can ever measure the worth or impact of this kind of Christian service? This is no narrow spirituality. It is the reflection of the One who yearned over men and grieved because He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. The very words 'saving health' have a beneficent savour about them. They speak of a gathering of broken fragments that have neither coherence nor purpose by themselves and making them into a work of beauty and worth. Is that not exactly what God has done for our broken down personalities? Do you not desire your family and friends to know and share it? Then let the beauty

of God's health shine from your face and they shall be drawn.

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68:1-6

We shall never get anywhere in Christian life and service until we recognise that there is a fundamental difference, and consequently enmity, between good and evil; God and the Devil; and between the men ranged in activity on either side. Therefore we must not be shocked at the militant vigour of the first verse. It is war, and this is the marching song of the armies of God as they tramp to victory, led by their irresistible Commander. All opposition must be defeated and scattered. It is not a Psalm for faint hearts - they could never understand or swallow it. It is a Psalm for those who are persuaded that their cause is right and just because it is a cause that has been laid upon them by God Himself. Let God arise. Arm of the Lord awake and shake the nations. It is full of the clash of conflict, for God is marching on and His footsteps shake the kingdom of darkness and cause it to shrink and flee. But wait. Is this the same God in v.5-6, so full of sweet tenderness and care? Yes the very same, and He makes His mightiest warriors tender like Himself. Look for one when you are in need.

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68:7-18

How often the Psalmist calls us to review history that we might trace both the goodness and severity of God. He is one God, ever the same, but men see Him differently. The imperious rebel who resists the Word of this God sees and will see His righteous judgment, while repentant and believing men shall see His grace and mercy. These verses are all full of God and the sermons on God are manifold. He went before His people, and He has not changed. (7) The presence of God is power. (8) He confirmed His inheritance when it was weary. (9) The Lord gave the Word. He speaks and it is done. (11) God desires and He will do it. (16) The chariots of God are counted by their thousands. He is indeed a glorious Lord who has ascended up on high and has received gifts of homage from men. This verse is quoted by Paul in Eph.4:8 in the form of the Authorised Version. He takes the verse to pre-figure the triumph of Christ who led captive the powers of evil (Col.2:15) Christ has won the victory over all the enemies of His holy battling Church and now He bestows the gifts of victory on His own. Do you see what it means? Christ cannot lose. He has already won. It is only a matter of time till it is seen and known and felt!

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68:19-35

At this point the Psalmist begins to contemplate the present and the future in the light of the presence of this same purposeful God who has so signally ruled and ordered the past. Since God changes not, the man expects mighty workings and victories. But what of the twentieth century? Things have not changed, save that the gifts and benefits and blessings God gives are at present spiritual gifts. The Kingdom is a secret Kingdom and its working and increasing are hidden from mortal eyes but it shall crystallise into exceedingly concrete manifestation when God's time comes. We fail miserably when we are dazzled by 'big' things and people and great fuss and commotion. These seldom have any significance in the purpose of God. Jesus was a nonentity, so was Paul. They were discounted and written off as failures. But when all the prattle of vain popularity-seeking men was gone, and the men were back in dust, what God had done through His men was still there. What God does lasts. Would God that men had eyes to see. Perhaps they do and decide it is too costly.

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69:1-12

Here is a man of God who is plumbing the depths of distress and suffering to the extent that he cries out in his pain as if he could bear no more for he knows that his person and work have become the subject of mockery in the ribald and bawdy songs of the drunkards. How it must have seared the man's spirit. It wore him down (3) and we cannot but wish that there had been some person there to run to his side and show kindness and care. That would have been high and holy and Christlike Service. There is nothing in the man that asks why this should happen to him. But in expressing his grief he recognises two causes of his suffering. In v.5 he traces the connection of suffering and sin. And in v.9 it is faithfulness and loyalty to his God that has brought the venom

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of men against him. We need grace to admit that nil our distress is not holy, but we also need much grace to keep from explaining too easily the distress of our fellows. Job's plight was not what men thought it was. -The man here finds himself nearer God than ever and prays that other loyal souls would not be deflected from the path because of what was happening to him. (6) Suffering ripens and sweetens a roan like this. That is proof of his holiness.

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69:13-21

We began with the good Psalmist and we find ourselves reading words that take us right to the Cross of the blessed Saviour. Now this teaches us a very important lesson. Every true servant of God must walk this way in greater or lesser degree. We need to remember that our Lord Himself was drawn into darkness to such an extent that He asked the terrible question: 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?'. We then, must never expect nor ask for an easier passage through this world than the Saviour who had no sin of His own to suffer for. Reproach, shame, dishonour all came to this man (19). God knew and allowed it and it broke the men's heart, for such is the cost of partaking in the work of redemption. There is no easy way. But just as in the case of Jesus, the men who should have been by his side to ease and help and encourage were nowhere to be found. Their inhuman neglect was failure that sorely displeased God. See to it that you are not found thus. cf. Matthew 25:42-46.

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69:22-36

As the Psalmist thinks of the intolerable inhumanity of his enemies he sees it as not merely human cruelty but as devilish fury and hatred by men who having alienated themselves by wicked works from all that is of God must of necessity persecute God's servants. He therefore breaks into a passage of fierce imprecation. Many commentators and preachers feign shock and horror at such 'unchristian sentiments' but a generation of men who make nuclear weapons of mass destruction have no cause to be so pious. In any case, such 'nice' men are often found to have the poison of asps under their tongues when they give vent to their spleen against those they call fundamentalists'. There is a whole section of our Church that would rather bow to Rome with all its blasphemy than be seen dead on a platform with a minister who believes, preaches and runs his Kirk according to the Scriptures. Judgment must come to overthrow the wicked perverters of God's truth and work. When Jesus prayed forgiveness it was for those that knew not what they were doing. These are Jesus' words. But when men know, as men do know, there is nothing to keep back the retribution of God, and the faithful will yet see what they have warned men will duly come.

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It is all very well to say that no man, however saintly, has any right to be telling God to hurry things on. But we all do it. We know at times that we are right; that our cause is truth and that we must finally be vindicated; and when we see, and are forced to abide under, the gloating contempt of our enemies we cannot but allow our human notions of God's methods to overcome our faith, and we cry to God to get a move on. Is it not amazing how very leisurely God is and how He takes His time in doing His will. But He is never inactive. Even the quietest days are filled with His going and coming, and 'He is least seen when all the powers of ill are most abroad'. Do you really think God is falling down on the job of ordering your life? Come now, is He really too slow? Auld you take over the reins 'right now? No? Then wait for Him, and in waiting, remember He heard your prayer and is not unmindful of your distress. Isn't that a comfort?

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This is the song of old age, when many years of the goodness of God stretch out into the past. They have not been easy years for the man has been taught of God since he was a youth and he has had his fair share of woe and worry. But, still faced with difficulty, and that particular sense of weariness that can lay hold upon the old, the man looks back to all the way that God has led and the remembrance of it kindles his prayer which occupies the whole of the first half of the Psalm. The prayer gives way to praise and a sense of confidence and he would

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testify to the young that the arm of the Lord is strong enough for them as they now take the place of the front line warriors. When there are aged saints, who by their loyalty and grace, and not least their tinge of good humour, are able to kindle the flame of like warrior spirit in the young, then we shall have no fear for coming days. But where are the saints? In some fellowships the young have to be old before their time. And they rise to it. Thank God.

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If this Psalm speaks of Solomon it certainly speaks also of a greater than Solomon, a King who shall reign in righteousness and whose government shall have no end. All the inventions of men that mar the fair face of the earth and make countless thousands mourn will be done away: no more graft, corruption, drink, gambling, hatred, war, lust, pride, poverty, vain worldliness and Christ-rejecting contempt from sinners. If we did not believe that the victory of Christ would come we could never go on. It would be pointless, and the cost far too great to be borne. But the victory will come when the King comes and the whole earth shall be full of His glory and no mark of sin or remembrance of it will remain to mar His enjoyment of His ransomed and perfected people, nor their worship and enjoyment of Him. Neither the King nor His subjects will be ashamed of their scars, but shall we not be inclined to forget our own when we see His? The glory will be all His. That we should share it, even to see it, is something to look forward to.

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