

Young People's Forum (III.17)

Dear Young People,

A short time ago I was sitting in devotions in Seminary – The Seminary has devotions every day of class and chapel on Wednesday. During devotion one of the students reads a part of Scripture and leads the students and professors in prayer. On Wednesday, during chapel, in addition to singing and prayer, either a professor or a local minister from our denomination gives a short meditation on some Scripture passage. Because I usually work in my Seminary office a couple of times a week, I take advantage of these devotional periods during the day.

A short time ago one of the students read Psalm 56 and we sang the versification of the Psalm in our Psalter. Because I am convinced that the Psalms are a spiritual biography of every Christian in the Christian's union with Christ, I listened carefully to the words of the Psalm to see how they applied both to Christ and to me – or any child of God. Let me just briefly go through the Psalm to demonstrate how this all worked out in my mind. I will take the Psalm verse by verse.

But notice, first of all, the heading of the Psalm: "To the chief musician upon Jonath – elem – rechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath." While these headings are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, they are very old and are usually accurate. While no commentator knows exactly what the large word means (and similar words in other Psalms), all agree that a "Michtam" is a Psalm of remembrance. That is, it is a Psalm of such importance that it is intended to be used to remind Israel of some great event in the Psalmist's life and, prophetically, in Christ's life.

Further, this introduction was written for the chief musician; that is, it was written for the man who was in charge of the music that was played and sung in the temple during worship.

Finally, the historical occasion for this Psalm is "when the Philistines took him [David] in Gath." David, out of fear of Saul who was hunting him to kill him, because Saul knew David was destined to be Israel's king, had fled to the Philistines to find a safe place to hide. But the Philistines were bitter enemies of Israel and captured David. When David was brought before the king, David feigned madness; and because the king was superstitiously terrified by madmen, he ordered David to be driven out of the land. You may find the story in I Samuel 21:10-15.

There is one more point about this Psalm and about more of the Psalms that speak of the enemies of the Psalmists and of the nation of Israel. They are the enemies of the people of God, and are therefore not only enemies from foreign nations (Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Syria) but also spiritual enemies who threaten to destroy God's people. In the new dispensation, they are the well-known triumvirate: the world, the devil and his hosts, our own sinful nature. Now, let us look at the Psalm.

Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me.

Historically, this is David's prayer when he found himself in the clutches of Achish, the king of Gath. He knew he was destined to be king of Israel. He seeks the mercy of God: a mercy, which he desires to deliver him from almost certain death; but also a mercy because of

his sin, for his flight to Gath was sinful, he did not trust in God to take care of him in Palestine; he fled to the enemy. He brought the danger on himself

Prophetically this refers to Christ who is the one great King destined to rule over the everlasting kingdom of heaven; but now in the hands of those determined to destroy him, Christ too pleads for God's mercy – partly because he seeks deliverance from his enemies, but partly also because he bears the sins of his people and endures the terrible wrath of God.

We sing in fellowship with Christ, for our enemies seek to destroy us through persecution, but also the devil and his demons are intent on destroying us spiritually so that we remain in his clutches even in hell.

Mine enemies would daily swallow me up, for they be many that fight against me, O thou Most High.

It is not difficult to see how this is a historical fact for the Psalmist. The whole nation of Philistia was against him to destroy him. But let us not forget: he carried Christ in his loins, for he was a father of Christ. The devil was intent on preventing Christ from coming as well as to destroy Israel's king. And so he turns to God to remind God to take note of his terrible plight.

Christ is speaking prophetically also, because everyone was his enemy. Even we are, apart from God's grace, Christ's enemies. Not only were the Jews his enemies, but also Pilate, Herod, the people and Satan and his demons who roamed about in Jerusalem doing what they could to destroy Christ. Christ also implores God to take note of all these enemies.

Because we belong to Christ, we beseech God to take note of our many enemies: Satan and his devils, the wicked world that hates Christ and us, and our own sinful nature against which we have to do battle every moment – for all seek our destruction. When we make this prayer our own, it is almost as if we are saying: Lord take note of our enemies – and of how I am my own worst enemy, for sin is always present with me. These enemies we face are cruel, relentless and a far greater danger to us than we realize. We sail blithely along as if we are in no danger, but the danger is great and very real.

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what man can do unto me.

What a marvelous expression of David's complete trust in God. He confesses his own fear at the cruelty of his enemies, but his fear melts away when he thinks of his God. He also confesses that he believes for himself what the Scriptures, (part of which had already been written by this time) comfort him, and he praises them.

We ought not to be reluctant to say that Christ was also afraid. The Scriptures themselves tell us that he was like us in all things, including our temptations, except for our sin. And his bloody sweat in Gethsemane can be understood only by remembering Christ's fear of his calling to bear the wrath of his Father in heaven. But his trust was also in his God who had said, prophetically in the Scriptures, that he would take care of his own Son and deliver him.

Who of us are not frightened? Not only by evil men, but by Satan and his great power, so much greater than ours. And who would deny that sometimes we are afraid of ourselves – and our great capacity to commit awful sins. But God's word speaks of our deliverance and this calms our frightened spirits.

Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. Shall they escape by iniquity> in thine anger cast down the people, O God.

How clearly this describes David's reason for fear: not only fear of physical harm that might come to him, but his fear of the powers of hell also who are dogging him every moment of his life and are waiting for his **soul**. They desire to destroy him **spiritually**. Helpless in his own strength, he pleads with God to "cast them down."

We may have some difficulty in seeing how Christ could be frightened by the devil. But do not forget that the devil was constantly tempting him to leave the way of obedience (Matt. 4:1-11, Matt. 16:21-23). And once again I remind you that Christ was tempted in all point in which we are tempted (Heb. 4:15).

How easy this can be applied to ourselves. We may not always be aware of how the wicked wrest our words, lie in wait for us, mark our steps and wait for our soul, but this is partly because the world is still too preoccupied with its own problems to give full attention to the church; and partly, sad to say, because, in our desire to be looked upon with favor by the world (and the departing church) we compromise our faith. But when we come to our senses, we know the need to pray "Thy kingdom come," a prayer that asks for judgments upon the wicked.

Thou tellest (countest) my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

The Psalmist makes a remarkable statement with this expression. Speaking of his wanderings, he confesses that he suffers grievously. But he is assured that God puts his tears in his bottle; that is, God preserves them for eternity. God counts each tear David sheds, and each tear, brought about by suffering, is cherished and preserved by God. But this is true, says the Psalmist, because all this suffering is determined by God himself and comes at God's will.

Christ can surely say this, first through David and then in his own life. God remembers Christ's sufferings into eternity, because they are the sufferings that secured salvation of God's elect people. And so it had been ordained from all eternity.

But because Christ's sufferings are our sufferings as we fill the cup of his sufferings in our own lives, God cherishes and preserves every tear that creeps down our cheeks and finds delight in it, for our tears are brought about by suffering for Christ's sake. And as we make this confession our own, we too confess that no sufferings come by chance, but are all written in God's book.

When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word: in the Lord will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid of what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God; I will render praise unto thee. For thou hast delivered by soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

David is clearly praising God for his deliverance from his enemies. But strikingly, he also ends with a request that God preserve him in the future from falling in order that he may go to heaven. That is significant, for David confesses that it was his own sin that brought him into such danger.

It is not entirely clear how this refers to Christ, but it surely means, among other things, that Christ's prayer is also one of thanksgiving that his Father brought him up out of the grave and exalted him in the highest heavens – as God had promised. And perhaps Christ is also praying that the wonderful things he accomplished in his work of suffering and dying may endure for his people into all eternity.

But surely we who belong to Christ rejoice at deliverance from our troubles that we brought upon ourselves; which troubles by the way are all brought on by our own sin, even our sin in Adam. But we, who have found deliverance from God and praise his glorious name, cannot help but pray that God will keep our feet from falling that we may go to heaven. Sin becomes a great burden and we long for full deliverance.

This briefly shows how we must read, study and sing the Psalms. No wonder that the apostle Paul urges us to sing with our understanding.

I hope you see a little of how beautiful the singing of the Psalms can be.

With love in the Lord,

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