



Beggars in Need of Help (Psalm 28:2)

By Peter Barnes

We expect life to be normal, by which we think of something resembling Utopia. However, we find it full of troubles, and it dislocates our thinking. Christians have an explanation for this: the world bears marks of its original goodness, but it is everywhere fallen, and groans for redemption (Rom.8:18-25). Psalm 28, from the pen of David, deals with this subject of troubles in the world of the believer. Over his lifetime David had confronted Goliath, fled from Saul, fallen into the sins of adultery and murder, and suffered the rebellion and then the death of his own son, Absalom. In Psalm 28, David seems to be referring when he was under a real threat of death, perhaps when Saul was trying to hang onto the throne or when Absalom was trying to seize it.

In verse 2, David writes: ‘Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to You for help, when I lift up my hands toward Your most holy sanctuary.’ Spurgeon is at his best in commenting on this: ‘We stretch out empty hands, for we are beggars; we lift them up for we seek heavenly supplies; we lift them towards the mercy seat of Jesus, for there our expectation dwells.’

WE ARE BEGGARS BEFORE GOD

David has looked into the pit of death, and is pleading for mercy. Ever felt like that? Ever done that? It feels like everything is against you, and the next step might as well be death. As is done elsewhere, God is described as a rock, in fact, says David, ‘my rock’ (28:1; see 18:2). Not just *a* rock or *the* rock but *my* rock. The God who made heaven and earth can be addressed as our God just as we are His people.

Hebrews would often lift their hands in prayer (e.g. 1 Kings 8:22), and even Calvin said that it is ‘an aid to pious and true

prayer’. One point about having one’s hands uplifted – which is certainly not compulsory in Scripture – is that they were empty. There are those who seek to earn merit before God and there are those who know that we can only be beggars before Him. We are beggars who cry out to Him. Again, just as the posture in prayer is not mandated, yet it ought to be noted that David prays out loud, with his voice. The two blind who cried out to Jesus as the Son of David – the Messiah – were desperate for mercy, and cried out aloud (Matt.9:27). If you find your prayers are getting like a dull shopping list, try speaking out loud, even crying out loud.

WE LOOK TO GOD IN HEAVEN

All through Solomon’s prayer of dedication at the opening of the temple in Jerusalem, heaven is described as ‘Your dwelling place’ (1 Kings 8:30). Solomon recognised the grandeur of God: ‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built’ (1 Kings 8:27; see Isa.66:1-2). Our hands are empty, that is true, but they are pointed to heaven where God dwells in all glory.

Heaven is not the place we wish to escape to, but the place where God manifests His presence, and to which we look for help and supplication.

GOD’S SANCTUARY IS OUR COMFORT

David looks toward God’s most holy sanctuary, which often refers to Solomon’s temple – but in David’s day that had not yet been built. Spurgeon goes straight to the New Testament fulfilment in the mercy seat of Jesus (Heb.9:11-14). The earthly temple looks to the heavenly temple, and is fulfilled in Christ

who is both priest and sacrifice, and who enters heaven for the sake of His people who will follow Him.

In verses 6-7 David praises God and gives thanks to Him as his strength and shield. He knew that back in verses 1-2, but now there is a joyful and grateful spirit, rather than a desperate plea for mercy. How do we recover from being in dire need to being lifted up and exulting in the Lord? It is not mechanical but it is clear – it is by crying out to the Lord as a beggar pleads for help and mercy. Look not to your sacrifices and good deeds, but to the most holy sanctuary – to the cross of Christ – where God meets His people. This leads David to look to God to save others, to carry His wounded sheep forever (28:8-9).

David did not need a counselor so much as to talk to himself

and to take himself through what it means to trust God. We come as beggars, we look up to heaven, and we go through the sanctuary which points to Calvary.

*Approach my soul, the mercy seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer.
There humbly fall beneath His feet,
For none can perish there.*

These words of John Newton echo the ancient text of David.

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