

Psalm 28

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[0 : 0 0] Lord, as we come to your word this morning, help us to listen carefully. May we be not just hearers of your word, but doers as well. Use it to help us to live wholeheartedly for Jesus and to honour him as king.

Amen. Well, friends, I wonder if at times you feel that God is not listening. Of us hearing God's voice, entire books have been written and divisions down denominational lines have been made.

But what of God hearing us? What of him listening to our prayers? Think about those moments of agonising pain when you don't know what to say and you bear your soul begging for something from God, but nothing.

Or the times you're shamed by a repulsive and sinful act when you know that you need forgiveness but surely this is too much to ask forgiveness for and you barely feel worthy even daring to pray.

Or maybe less dramatically, in the humdrum of daily life, you stay faithful in your prayer routine, but it is just that. Routine. Lacklustre. Unexciting.

[1 : 1 8] God seems distant or uninterested. I mean, how are we even to know that God has heard our prayers? There's no little profile picture to drop down and let you know that your message has been read.

No feedback. How do we know that he's even heard us in our moments of greatest need and in the day today? If only there was some reliable response that God would give us.

Wouldn't that relieve so much anxiety? Something other than the silence after that. Amen. Well, if this is a struggle you've had, rest assured that you're in good company because this is the desperate call of David in this psalm, isn't it?

In verses 1 and 2, he cries out to God, my rock, be not death to me. Hear my voice when I cry. David's distressed cry here is begging for God to hear him.

But if this is David's cry, how does he go from this point in verse 1 and 2 to exalting and praising God in verses 6 and 7? Where does he find the comfort, the strength and the joy to keep firmly trusting in the God of his salvation?

[2 : 2 6] And speaking of good company, this desperate call is not far from the words of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane or on the cross, isn't it? So as we turn to Psalm 28, let's carefully consider what it has to say and listen intently to God's word so that we may be assured that in him we are safe and secure so that his word may sustain us when these questions and struggles arise.

And at times when we're tempted to doubt, we can be reminded of the truth. And as we look at this psalm, we'll see its structure is split into two major sections. Verses 1 to 5 show us David's prayer to God.

And then in the second section, verses 6 to 9, we see his praise. We see his desperation moved to adoration. So let's dig in. Verses 1 and 2.

And immediately, as we carefully look at these verses, they pose a huge problem for us, don't they? David is calling out to God and it's not until later that we get the content. But at first, he is pleading with God to listen to him.

To you, O Lord, I call. My rock, be not death to me. Lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. And it's right there, isn't it, that our issue arises.

[3 : 41] For David, God's silence means death. It means judgment. That's what we understand when we think a bit about the pit. Because, of course, the pit is not just a hole in the ground, but death itself.

And here we see it as separation from and as the judgment of God. Listen to Psalm 88, which helpfully illustrates how terrible it actually is. From verse 3.

For my soul is full of troubles and my life draws near to Sheol. I am counted among those who go down to the pit. I am a man who has no strength, like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave.

Like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep.

Your wrath lies heavy upon me and you overwhelm me with all your waves. The imagery is vivid, isn't it? The psalmist is in anguish as he draws near to this place devoid of any light.

[4 : 44] His strength has been drained as the anger of God sits oppressively on him like a weight. He is forgotten by God as good as dead. This is not a place where you want to be.

And it is this that David is saying the silence of God brings about. Because silence isn't just the absence of noise. It's significant, isn't it?

And what it signifies here is the end of a relationship and judgment. Think of the end of any relationship. Nothing more defines its end than the day you stop talking. It's not so much the big fight that ends it, but the fact that after the fight you don't talk anymore.

Any ongoing relationship has ongoing conversation and discussion. Indeed, that is the basic requirement of any relationship. But as soon as the talking stops and silence rings out, how can the relationship keep going?

How can you have a relationship with someone if they refuse to talk with you? Think also of a courtroom. When the talking stops, it's too late for the guilty.

[5 : 54] As soon as the judge pronounces his judgment and bangs his gavel, as soon as that silence rings out, that is it. No more time to plead your case.

No more weighing up witnesses. Only punishment remains. And so David has correctly diagnosed the issue, hasn't he? And he is only too aware of the implications.

He's not over-exaggerating. This isn't just poetic license. If God is finished with David and silent towards him, all that remains is for him to go down to the pit.

And if that is the case for us, that God is not here in our prayers, that he is not listening to us, this verse has huge implications for us. For if, in our prayers, God is being truly silent to us, we are as good as dead.

And therefore, in light of this, David pleads for rescue. Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands towards your most holy sanctuary.

[7 : 00] And here David introduces a major motif of this psalm, and that is hands. And here we see David's posture before God, his lifted hands, lifted in prayer to God.

Now the word mercy is perhaps a bit misleading here because of the baggage we often associate with the word mercy. Mercy carries with it all our understanding of sinfulness, being unrighteous and unable to come before God, and needing to ask him to not treat us as we deserve, but instead to grant us mercy.

All of which, of course, is true, and is true of David as well. But when we look at the context, I don't think that's the type of mercy that David is talking about here. In this psalm, David isn't identifying himself with the wicked, but rather in contrast to them.

What might be helpful, perhaps, is to think about the difference between the perpetrator and the victim of a violent crime. At different points in time, both cry out for mercy. The perpetrator, they ask for mercy once they've been caught by the police and carted off to jail.

They're guilty of breaking the law and ask for mercy to be saved from the punishment of the law. But the victim, they also plead for mercy, don't they? In the midst of the crime. Maybe with God or maybe the perpetrator, but they plead for mercy.

[8 : 17] Now, the victim is not guilty of anything, are they? They haven't done anything wrong. The mercy they're calling out for is not to be saved from the punishment of the law, but to be saved from this evil person and this evil situation.

And the same is true for David. In this psalm, he's not calling out so much for salvation from his sin. And why not? Well, because as he trusts in the Lord, he is no longer counted as a sinner.

David trusts in the Lord. He's been made righteous by God. His sins are no longer counted against him. To be clear, David was human and sinful. He was not made righteous by any of his deeds, of course.

But because he has been made righteous by God, he is now righteous. He's no longer a sinner in the eyes of God. And so, as he lifts his hands in prayer towards the most holy place, towards the presence of God himself, he pleads for salvation from sinners, from wicked and evil people.

And as we look at these next verses, we see exactly how different David is from these wicked and evil people. Straight away, we see the duplicity of these workers of evil.

[9 : 30] They speak peace outwardly towards those around them, while inwardly, they plot evil and scheme to take advantage of one another. They act friendly towards their neighbours to keep them unsuspecting so that at just the right time, when the neighbour's concentration has lapsed, they can take advantage of them and stab them in the back.

As opposed to David, who lifts up his hands to God in prayer, these evil hands are lifted up against their neighbour. Therefore, God calls upon, sorry, David calls upon God to bring justice upon them, to reward them according to the work of their hands, to give to them the just judgment that their hands have brought about and deserved.

And it is right for God to justly punish them so. Because this viciousness towards their neighbour reveals their true attitude towards God and their complete disregard of the work of his hands.

Verse 5, they do not regard the works of the Lord or the works of his hands. They do not honour the Lord and therefore do not honour and respect the things that he has done.

And what are the works of his hands that David is referring to here? Well, in a broad sense, everything. God's role in creating and sustaining all created things. But perhaps most significantly in the context of the book of Psalms is God's work in establishing his king.

[10 : 58] Look back quickly at Psalm 2 which together with Psalm 1 introduce and headline the entire book and its purpose as a collected works. Psalm 2 verse 4, He who sits in the heavens laughs.

The Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury saying, As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree.

The Lord said to me, You are my son. Today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. God is establishing his king over his people in his land, his anointed one.

That is the work of God's hands. But these wicked men do not regard them. They do not respect the Lord and his works and therefore don't respect his anointed one.

And rather than submit to God's rule through his king, they reject him. They're really anarchists, aren't they? They're rejecting the rule of the king. Which is therefore why they seek evil against one another.

[12 : 05] Because once you oppose the rule of the land, you oppose being able to live peaceably with your community. You have placed yourself outside of the community and how it functions.

You can't reject the rule of the land while living amongst people who embrace it. That's never going to work. And so, it's only natural that these wicked people, despite their outward show of peace, inwardly desire evil.

which is why God will tear them down and build them up no more. He will give to them the just judgment that their hands have brought about and deserved.

As they have sought to tear down their fellow man, so too will God tear them down to not be built up anymore. Through God's sustaining grace, these wicked people have been allowed to prosper.

God has tolerated their sinful ways, but no longer. God will punish those that refuse to acknowledge his rule and the works he has done.

[13 : 09] Judgment pronounced, the gavel rings out. It will be final, but it will be just. No longer will he allow them to continue this evil.

He will bring punishment and destruction on them, and it will be complete. And the warning here is clear, isn't it? What are you doing with your hands? How do you regard the work of God's hands?

Do you live with God's anointed king as your king? Are you, like David, lifting your hands in prayer to God? Does your heart trust in him and honour his work and his king? Or, like the wicked, do you reject God's handiwork, his king Jesus, and lift up your hands against your neighbour?

If so, now is the time to repent, to turn to God, and to trust in him and his king. For David, though, he won't be dragged off with the wicked. And why is that?

Well, verse 6. Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. The Lord has heard David's cries. There is no need to fear silence from God, for God has heard him.

[14 : 19] Despite David's fears of being dragged down to the pit, God was never far away from him, never truly silent nor deaf. God is a steadfast and reliable rock from verse 1.

He is the source of life, the strength of David, and his shield, his protection. Despite how desperate or despairing David is, God has always been near and always hearing his prayers.

God is not some distant God who has set the world in motion and then left it to its own devices, a God whose attention we need to flag down by speaking louder.

God is acutely attentive to his work and he is continually sustaining it by his power and is always near to his people. God never turns a blind eye or a deaf ear to his people.

And so, with David's confidence in God restored, he proudly exclaims his salvation by God and as a result, his heart is lifted up, it exalts, and bursts out in songs of praise.

- [15 : 25] Overwhelmed by the mercy and goodwill that he has received, David can't help but respond in praising and thanking the one who helped him. And incredibly, this salvation is not just limited to the one man.

In verse 8, the Lord is the strength of his people, he is the saving refuge of his anointed. O save your people and bless your heritage, be their shepherd and carry them forever.

Just as he is the strength of David, so too is God the strength of all his people. That's what he means by your heritage here, he means God's chosen people. And according to his nature and the promises by his word, he will save them.

And there's no surprise that it is through his anointed one that God will save his people, except that ultimately it isn't through his king David, but his forever king, Jesus, the Christ.

Because of course, unlike David, Jesus was dragged off of the wicked. He was unfairly put to death. Not because his deeds deserved it, but because wicked men acted how David here says they would act.

- [16 : 34] They rejected God's king. And the cry of David here is so similar to Jesus' on the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? What's such a horrible moment as Jesus hangs there on the cross and God pours out his wrath on his king.

The punishment from God for the sins of the world. The perfect, intimate relationship between God and his own son severed. Silence from God. But just as David trusted in the Lord and was helped, of course, so too was Jesus.

God did not abandon his soul to Sheol. He did not let his Holy One see corruption. And in saving his anointed, God's hands were at work establishing his king.

For in being raised back to life, Jesus is now sitting at the right hand of God, reigning over all creation, the Christ, God's anointed king. And it is this that should really encourage and strengthen us in our prayer because ultimately we don't know the particular situation that David was calling out for rescue from.

Maybe he was running from Saul for the 30th time. Maybe it was something that we simply aren't told about. But in either case, it wasn't just that occasion David was praying for salvation from but also looking forward to that greater and fuller salvation that is found in Christ's death and resurrection.

- [18 : 02] And well, I mean, he had to wait for a thousand years for the answer to that prayer, didn't he? But in God sending Jesus, we can see and know that God has heard and continues to hear the voice of his people.

He has not sent his people off to the pit with the wicked but has saved them from death. As we see in John chapter 10, Jesus is the good shepherd.

He intimately knows his own and lays down his life for them. He tenderly carries his flock and cares for them. So lift up your hands to him, confident that our king hears our prayers.

Be reassured that if you are one of God's people, the silence in the moments after your amen is not silence from God. When it feels as if God is distant and deaf to you, this psalm is one to remind us that it can never be the case.

He is always near to his people. In those moments of pain or shame, be assured that God hears you because he sent his son to save and rescue you.

- [19 : 13] There is no need for a secret formula to follow or magic words to say in order to make God hear you. No level of faith or holiness to be reached that will force God to listen to your prayers.

God hears you because he loves and cares for his chosen people. As closely as a shepherd gently carrying a lamb, God securely carries his people.

How can he not hear their prayers? And for that, like David, we should exalt and praise God for his works. We should sing out of our thankfulness and share of his wondrous power and strength.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for your good work in establishing him as your king over the world. Help us to honour the works of your hands.

May we not trust in the works of our hands or use them for evil against one another. May we constantly be lifting up our hands to you, trusting you for our help and salvation and forever exalting and praising you for safely carrying us in your hands.

[20 : 23] Amen.