

Psalm 18

Part Six –Vs.20-24

In this part of the psalm and in the next, we will see that the reasons for David's salvation are found equally in David's behavior and in God's character. We must remember that the concept of salvation in this psalm is not strictly limited to being saved from hell. David is not at all worried about the wrath of God. Rather, he has enemies who threaten him with destruction and utter ruin. Christians who have found peace with God and forgiveness of sins are nonetheless in need of a Savior. Therefore, we may rejoice exceedingly that we have a faithful High Priest, who ever lives to intercede for us. Christians are threatened by the devil, the worldly systems and the temptations of their own flesh. Ruin is far more probable than achievement. Achievement must be fought for and gained, while ruin will happen of itself. If you would like to be ruined, just fold your hands and do nothing. Ruin will surely come to you. How we need Jesus to be a Savior every day and all day!

²⁰ The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me.

In my spiritual experience I have often despaired of ever honestly being able to make such statements as David made. Perhaps it is because sincere Christians, in their utmost efforts to attain to holiness, are often very hard on themselves. The devil often torments such Christians by constantly reminding them of their imperfections, causing them to feel guilty.

Yet, much of our problem is in the understanding of righteousness. It is understood that our righteousness is not at all comparable to the righteousness of God. In order to be accepted by God, we must be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Have we forgotten that His righteousness is a gift to us, not something to be attained, but merely to be received as a matter of grace? If so, why then do we despair, because of our imperfections? Shall we not have recourse once again to His blood and be cleansed of our sins?

David is not concerned about His acceptance with God. He has confidence in God's love for Him. David is in need of deliverance from his enemies. God is His Savior. Why did God save David? The Lord rewarded him according to his righteousness. Often the immediate salvation from perils of certain situations will depend upon our righteousness, such as it may be. God, of course, remembers that we are dust. Therefore our righteousness is under no demand to be a perfect righteousness, before God will save us. He rewards us *according* to our righteousness.

The righteousness of which David speaks is not the righteousness of God in Christ which is offered to us in the shed blood of Jesus. It is his own righteousness, or as the Russian translation states it, "The Lord gave back to me, according to my *truth*." While in general it is also true, as Paul says, "Let God be true and every man a liar," nonetheless, we do have some discernment of truth, insofar as we are able to understand it. We may deliberately choose to be honest or dishonest. If we would only be honest in our approach to God, it would be enough to bring to us deliverance from many of our situations. Often it is only the moment of honesty that God is waiting for, as we pray to Him. What a comfort it is to know that He will reward our smallest effort to be honest before Him!

David also makes reference to the cleanness of his hands. Hands speak of deeds. Many Christians are struggling with guilt, because they feel defiled by the places where they have been, and by the people whom they have chanced to meet. Temptations seem to overwhelm them, tormenting them with unclean thoughts and desires. Yet, it is the deed that will finally count. It is not possible to avoid every sinful place. Sin is everywhere. It is not possible to avoid contact with sinful people. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Certain temptations cannot be avoided, as long as we live in the body on this earth. The body has appetites which cannot be completely denied, but must be satisfied with moderation. The opportunity to be immoderate always presents itself. The line of moderation itself is always quite blurred. While we must certainly flee certain temptations, others must be endured until they pass. It is not possible to prevent the thought that occurs in our minds incidentally. Once an unholy image has been stamped on the memory, it is impossible to entirely forget it. In short, there is no such righteousness that is free from temptation, but we shall be happy indeed, if we have kept ourselves from the actual deed. If our hands have been clean, then we shall have a special claim to deliverance.

²¹ For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God.

The ways of the Lord are the ways of civilization. They include all of the rules of etiquette and diplomacy. They are always an expression of courtesy and respect, even to enemies, those with whom we have conflict. Even with Satan, Michael the archangel durst not bring railing accusation against him, when they quarreled over the body of Moses. This in no way implies that Michael compromised, only that in the process of that conflict, he remained respectful, and he handled the situation diplomatically. While not belittling Satan or his pretensions, he refuted his claim to the body of Moses.

David also gives here the contrast to the ways of the Lord. The Russian translation reads as follows: "I was not impious (profane) before my God." The word which is usually translated impious, or ungodly, has at its root the word for honor. It signifies not giving honor to someone, especially to God. It could be translated, "I did not behave dishonorably (ignobly) before my God." The English translation, on the other hand, clearly speaks of leaving an existing relationship. The words "my God" obviously refer to a relationship. Wickedness is, in a word, lawlessness. In other words, David is saying, "I have not violated the covenant with my God."

The story may not be well known as a Bible story, but it is a worthy example for our discussion. (II Sam 10:..) Nahash the king of Ammon died, and David wished to honor the longstanding friendship that they had had. For the kindness that Nahash had shown to David, David was willing to show kindness to Hanun, the son of Nahash, now ruling in his stead. David in this was keeping the ways of the Lord, the ways of civilization. David sent messengers to bear condolences to Hanun for the death of his father, a most proper, civilized and courteous expression, in view of the relationship that had been. Hanun, however, wickedly departed from the friendship that his father had had with David. He humiliated the messengers of David, shaving half of their beards and cutting off half of their clothes, then sending them home in disgrace. Then the Ammonites perceived that they had made themselves odious to David, so they prepared for war. However, David in the end took away Hanun's crown and cut the Ammonite people with saws, iron harrows and axes.

If we have not offended unnecessarily, there will be a deliverance for us in the time of trouble. If we have been respectful to longstanding friendships, including the Biblical covenant with God Himself, God will surely come to our aid. Where we have been rude, let us humble ourselves and make peace with our adversaries quickly, while we are in the way with them, so that we will not be counted guilty of the conflict. A simple, sincere apology can wonderfully smooth ruffled feathers. The way out of our trouble is often through humility, the recognition of the rights of others. By rudeness and refusal to honor others, we often bring our trouble on ourselves. Should we expect deliverance then? Jesus said

that if we fail to agree with our adversary, and should he have us thrown in jail, we will not be delivered until we have fully paid for our sin.

²² For all his judgments *were* before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me.

Here the Russian Bible has “commandments” in place of “judgments.” There is harmony between these two thoughts. Jesus stated, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” It follows, therefore, that we will be judged according to how we have kept His commandments. Commandments reflect priorities, what is valuable or important. These are defined by a judgment, which is in essence an evaluation. As Daniel said to Belshazzar, “God has numbered your kingdom and finished it. You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and to the Persians.” Why did God so evaluate Belshazzar’s reign? Why did He give such an extreme sentence? Belshazzar had grossly violated God’s commandments. Hence, David says here that he was attentive to God’s view of things, mindful of His commandments. For this reason God did not fail to deliver him from his troubles.

David here makes reference to statutes. “Statutes” is not merely another word for laws and rules. It rather speaks of a constitution, providing a basis for laws and rules yet to be made. It is descriptive of a covenant, an agreement by which parties may live together in peace and harmony. It is the statutes of a constitution, which have power to unite people into one body. They are the principles, which provide the foundation for the Church. One reason why God delivered David was because David had not refused to live by the statutes of God’s covenant with Israel. By adhering to these, he had a special claim to deliverance.

To “put away his statutes” implies a deliberate refusal to live by them or even to acknowledge them as being valid or significant. The Russian Bible says here, “from His statutes I did not deviate.” This might imply negligence to detail, or a failure to understand the purpose or direction. It might also imply a self-imposed improvisation base upon a whim. David did not even deviate from the statutes of His Lord. He did not use the letter of the law to twist matters to his own advantage. He rightly apprehended the spirit of the law and adhered to it. He did not stray into error through negligence or inattention to details. Therefore, he might well expect his God to be faithful to save him.

What we are speaking of here directly concerns the unity of the Church. There is safety in the Body of Christ, a refuge from the pressures of this wicked world system, as long as the statutes are kept. Those who trouble the local congregation are those who put away the Lord’s statutes. They disrupt the flow of Church life and the moving of the Spirit in the local congregation. They are contrary and self-willed. They draw attention to themselves unnecessarily. They are a burden to others. If these are not discerned in time, they may split the church and create scandals. Paul says we should pray to be delivered from those who trouble us. Our own deliverance may well depend upon how well we fit into the Body of Christ.

²³ I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity.

The Russian Bible translates “upright” as “faultless” or “blameless.” The last part of this verse reads, “I was careful not to sin.” David had been subjected to many temptations, feelings, desires and opportunities to sin. No doubt he had been wearied to the extreme by the pressure tactics of Satan through his enemies. Yet, he understood the importance of a testimony of uprightness before God in order to win the victory. He knew that he could never pit his own strength against the enemy and expect to overcome. However, God was his Savior. If he wanted God to come to his aid, he could not expect to take Him for granted. He must find a common language with Him. There must be a basis for fellowship, a ground for acceptance with Him. He must somehow be pleasing to God.

David has not any righteousness in himself. He has nothing to offer God. He was born in sin and would always be prone to sin. How wonderful to realize that God is a merciful, forgiving Lord! To be pleasing to God David has only to turn away from sin. The

blood of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world, was powerful enough to provide the righteousness that David did not have in himself. In order to avail himself of that precious gift, he need only turn from his sin and deny the demands of his own nature.

We come to the conclusion that David was not speaking of being sinless in his past or in his nature, such as only Jesus ever was. He meant that in the course of this struggle with his enemies, he had been faithful to avoid sin, keeping his hands clean, obeying the Lord's commandments, adhering to the ways of civilization, never forgetting his position in the church as a member of the Body. If in any way he had slipped, he had been quick to correct himself. He had prayed for forgiveness and reconciled himself to those whom he had wronged. In every way he had obeyed the dictates of his conscience. Hence, his account with God was cleared.

²⁴ Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight.

David repeats the assertion that he began with in verse 20. Here he only adds the words, "in his eyesight." I would like to make these words the keynote of this message. There is a righteousness that man is capable of, which is acceptable to God, but not apparent to the man himself. The righteousness that a man envisions for himself and imagines that he can attain to has no more substance than a fragile soap bubble. The moment he seems to actually touch it, it vanishes and ceases to be. If for a few fleeting seconds, it might seem to rest on his fingertips before it vanished, how happy he would be!

The whole problem is that we view righteousness from our own perspective, instead of from God's. David made no claims to righteousness in his own eyesight. He was painfully aware of his imperfections, how in so many ways he could not be like the God that he loved. For David, however, it was enough that God counted him as righteous. As with Abraham, also an imperfect human being, Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him as righteousness. David, for his part, turned his heart after God, to seek after Him with all of his might. Therefore, he is known as a man after God's own heart, in spite of many a gross sin that had to be forgiven. It was not David himself, nor any other man, that counted him as such, but God said that David was a man after His own heart.

The whole question then is how God sees us, not how we perceive ourselves. God does not demand the impossible from us. We can be honest, choosing the truth. We can keep our hands clean from sinful deeds. We can remember our manners, even in a conflict, in keeping with the ways of civilization. We can honor relationships, covenants and agreements. We can obey the commandments of God's Word. We can be careful to avoid sin. Some temptations may not be avoidable, but many of them are. In a word we can actively demonstrate the leaning of our heart. If we are seeking God, will it not be obvious? This is a righteousness that God accepts. It is all a simple matter of choice and attitude. He will save those who are upright, those who choose to love Him and His ways.

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