

Psalm 28 -- Render to Them Their Desert! (Part 1 of 2)

Introduction – There are two kinds of imprecatory psalms in the Bible: national and personal. Psalm 28 is a personal imprecatory psalm. David is obviously the author as clearly stated in the superscription of this psalm which is part of inspired Scripture. We cannot be certain about the period of David's life when he endured these enemies because he experienced much tribulation in his life, before and after he became the King of Israel. Not knowing the background behind the writing will not affect the blessing we can receive from studying this imprecatory psalm for our daily application, especially with reference to dealing with our enemies.

Imprecatory psalms are not to be compared with the curses of the world because of unjust treatment. Such curses stem from a corrupt and vengeful heart. When not properly understood, imprecatory psalms can be erroneously interpreted from this perspective. There are some who reject these psalms as old fashioned and obsolete and only belonging to the Old Testament period when God was awesome and fierce. They feel that such psalms have no place in the New testament wherein God instructs His children to turn the other cheek and not curse like the Old Testament people of God such as King David! These interpreters have never been more wrong in thinking that in the Old and New Testaments God is not the same. He is the same in His holiness forever and He demands that all His children have the same regard for their enemies whether in the Old or New Testament period! To reject these marvellous imprecatory psalms by relegating them to the “Old Testament graveyard” is like burying precious gems in the ground and living a life of poverty in want of food and clothing.

Let these psalms speak for themselves and let us understand them the way that God wants us to so that we will not be poorer in spirit because we reject them in totality due to our ignorance.

- I. **A Desperate Supplication (28:1)** – David was so badly persecuted that he cried to the LORD and said that if the LORD did not hear him, he would be like dead men who die and end up in the pit, i.e. the grave. The intensity of his cry began with his God. He deliberately used the covenantal name, the LORD, and in the vocative to highlight his cry. It was not to man or to anyone on earth but to his LORD that he turned to for intervention. To be able to turn to the LORD is the mercy that God has bestowed only to His children throughout the ages. This direct access to His throne of grace and mercy is never shut unless His children choose to hold on to unrepentant sins. Then only will God not hear the cry of His children. Otherwise, all of God's children have been given direct access to Him without any earthly intermediary!

No matter how much David was moved by his enemies, he would not allow it to devastate him such that he ceased to trust in the LORD entirely. A child of God is said to be moved when he sins and fails to trust God in a particular trying circumstance. However, even when he did not exercise faith in a particular situation, it does not mean that he has no more faith in his God. David still cried to God by calling Him his rock, the bedrock of his faith whereby he would never cease to trust and believe in Him no matter what happened. David needed to be stabilized by the promises and presence of God in his life! So he cried to his LORD to not be silent to him. He needed the LORD to hear him whenever he called. At times when the trials are very present and painful internally and externally, it is very difficult to feel and know that God is present and has heard our cries. This was David's painful and lonely moment and thus he cried to God in this manner. When David cried to God to not be silent, it means that it was not because of any sinful conduct David had committed that the persecution came upon him. If he had committed sin, David would have begun with a cry of repentance and forgiveness as seen in Psalm 51.

Since he cried to the LORD to not be silent to him, and he knew that if he had sin in his heart the LORD would not hear him, we can safely conclude that this was a painful persecution for the faith. David was doing the will of God when he suffered. He said that if God was silent, then he might as well be dead. A dead man would not be able to do the will of God. He would not be able to serve the LORD. But he was a living soul and a child of God serving the LORD on earth, and David said that the LORD was his rock in time of great need. The LORD must not keep silent to his cry for help! This desperate supplication stems from a genuine and sincere heart crying to his LORD for help. There was no show of hypocrisy or any gamesmanship like preparing the ground with "sweet nothings" to soften God up so that God would hear him. David went straight to the heart of the matter and cried to his LORD who was his rock in time of great need! Verse 1 uses synthetic parallelism to teach this truth.

This is what we must also do - no airs and no pretence before God.

- II. **A Clear Distinction (28:2-3)** – David wanted his LORD to make a real distinction between him and his enemies. David was on earth to accomplish the LORD's work whereas his enemies were hindering him from doing God's work. David cried to the LORD to hear his supplications. The Hebrew root word for "supplication" means "to stoop or bend in kindness to an inferior." David acknowledged that the LORD is greater and higher than he was, no matter who David was on earth. Before God, David was always inferior. He pleaded with the LORD to hear, which means to act whenever he cried to Him. The Hebrew word "cry" is not merely to cry out loud to God but a cry for deliverance or help to be free! The context here is that David cried to the LORD to

free him from the trials and persecution of evil men. David felt like a man who was trapped and could not get out of the snare of these evil men. Basically he wanted the persecution to stop.

This can be our cry too whenever we face persecution. Just because we know that all things will work together for our good does not mean that we cannot pray for God's deliverance to get out of the trials, like David.

Using another synthetic parallelism, David pleaded with the LORD to hear him when he cried in this manner with his hands lifted up toward God's holy oracle. This "oracle" has to refer to "the innermost part of the sanctuary."¹ The most Holy place at this point in time refers to the Tabernacle which represents the presence or home of God on earth! When David lifted up his hands before the holy oracle, it means that he was pleading innocence before the LORD. His hands were clean and holy and therefore it was not because of any transgression on David's part that he was being persecuted by evil men. This was not a vengeful prayer to the LORD. David was being persecuted for his faith or for doing God's work! The evil men were actually hindering God who was working His will on earth through David to save mankind. This truth is important in helping us understand imprecatory psalms, both national and personal! Lifting up one's hands can mean to praise or to show the LORD that one's hands are clean and there is no hidden agenda, unlike men who hide things in their hands to hurt even as they plead for help as revealed in verse 3.

We need to understand that this "rule" of holiness in order to approach God has not changed one bit. Holy hands are a pre-requisite for worship and prayer at all times.

Verse 3 (synthetic parallelism) – The verb "draw away" means "to remove." David cried to the LORD that he did not want to be identified with his enemies in life and in death! He wanted God to make a clear distinction between him, a child of God, and the wicked men, the enemies of God! These wicked men were morally wrong and

¹**1 Kings 6:16** (KJV) "And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the walls with boards of cedar: he even built *them* for it within, *even* for the oracle, *even* for the most holy place." **1 Kings 6:19-23** (KJV) "And the oracle he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD. **20** And the oracle in the forepart *was* twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in the height thereof: and he overlaid it with pure gold; and so covered the altar *which was of cedar*. **21** So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he made a partition by the chains of gold before the oracle; and he overlaid it with gold. **22** And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that *was* by the oracle he overlaid with gold. **23** And within the oracle he made two cherubims *of olive tree, each* ten cubits high." [Emphasis added]

deserved to be condemned because of who they were and what they did before God. David was the opposite of all that characterized these wicked men. David was morally right and fully justified by Christ before God. He was accepted in the beloved whereas these wicked men were rejected in their condemnation! David also described them as "workers of iniquity." The Hebrew word "workers" describes someone who does something systematically and habitually. In this case, they worked iniquity systematically and habitually! They were not only characterized by sin but they acted out their depravity by a life of continuous sin! It was not a momentary lapse of concentration that resulted in a transgression but a pre-meditated act done over and over again as if it had become a way of life.

The nature of their wickedness is in their hypocrisy! This is the worst kind of wickedness. They spoke peace to their neighbours but mischief, i.e. evil, was in their heart. They were also Israelites, not Gentiles from another nation. They were supposed to be God's people as well. These wicked men would pretend to befriend their neighbours, giving them the impression that they were honest and well-meaning people. They would invite them to their homes and say the right things to them. They would talk about the things of God as if they believed in them. They would probably flatter and behave like godly Israelites to their neighbours in order to win their trust and gain their confidence. In reality, they had a hidden agenda. These wicked men would seek out neighbours who were of influence and of some use to these wicked men. They did not care one iota for their neighbours' welfare but only what they could get out of them. They had "mischief in their hearts." The Hebrew word for mischief is "evil."

This kind of evil men is common in churches, especially at leadership level. They would worm themselves into positions to gain favour and rewards to inflate their ego. They care only for themselves and no one else. Everyone is a rung on their ladder to enable them to get to the next level until they reach the top. Lives are hurt by them. The name of Christ is stomped by them and they could not care less. All they care about is their personal gain and glory. Flattery and the practice of simony are also common in churches today. Wicked men do not care one bit for God's people and the glory of God. They will lie and deceive to fulfil their hidden agenda. If they want to become deacons or elders in the church, they will study the character of the present leaders like a player studying the chess pieces. They will strategize to lure the leaders into their snare. They use money and flattery with close proximity. They go on mission trips and pray loudly so that the "right persons" can see and hear. These tactics were employed by wicked men in the days of David as well.

III. A Just Retribution (28:4-5) – David cried to his LORD in the imperative in verse 4, asking God to give to them according to the evil that they have done. This was an imprecation that David made to the LORD against his enemies. Synonymous parallelism was used (in verse 4) to emphasize his request! He implored his LORD to give to these wicked men the same degree of evil that they did to him. It was not a cry for vengeance but a cry to the Judge of heaven and earth for perfect justice! David did not ask for more or less but equity in judgement. Just because believers like David are commanded by God to turn the other cheek when it comes to being persecuted for Christ's sake does not mean that they ignore and reject God's justice on earth! Believers have the best sense of justice on this earth. They have the perfect Word of God as their guide to help them to determine right and wrong on the earth. To this end they must desire the justice of God to prevail on earth. This is also part of the Lord's Prayer where it says, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." Since God's will is always done in heaven, the believer is taught by Christ to pray the same for the earth! The will of God would include the justice of God.

What these wicked and evil men wanted to do to David, David cried that the same be done to them by the LORD. Let the evil deeds boomerang back to them! Haman built the gallows to hang Mordecai but God hanged Haman instead on the same gallows. If it were vengeance, then David would have taken matters into his own hands. He did not; He cried to his heavenly Father for justice. Since David was here on earth to do God's will, it was logical for him to cry to the LORD for intervention to stop these wicked men from hindering the work of God.

Eternity is at stake. God sent men like David to accomplish His will, which includes the salvation plan of God. Christ was to come from the lineage of David, thus David played an indispensable part in the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation for all mankind. Sinful men are dying in their sins and going to hell. This spiritual warfare has been going on for millenniums and it will only stop at the end of the millennial kingdom. But until then, these evil men will abound. God's people must continue to pray imprecatory prayers for God's justice to prevail on this earth and to stop these evil men from hindering the work and will of God in the lives of God's children. Believers today must learn to exercise the sense of justice as David's. This is good for us because it helps us to have the balanced and biblical perspective of right and wrong and also forgiveness and justice. Very often, a distorted view of sin and forgiveness has caused many to transgress. Some tend to think that when a person is forgiven he is also free from the consequences of his sins. This is not a biblical concept. God forgave us but He did not sweep the consequences of our sins under some invisible heavenly carpet. Believers are forgiven because the penalty of all their sins has been paid for by Christ. Christ took upon Him the penalty of our sins so that we do not need to pay for it. Christ took

the eternal punishment. The earthly temporal consequences of our sins must be borne by man himself. The Bible is replete with such examples, in both the Old and New Testaments. To pray imprecatory prayers like David is spiritually very healthy.

Verse 5 (Synthetic parallelism) – The reason is that these wicked men did not regard the works of the LORD. They were exposed to the works, i.e. the completed deeds of the LORD, but they refused to understand and acknowledge the LORD's work. It was revealed to them but they refused to accept it. A good example to highlight this point is that of King Saul's rejection and refusal to accept that David would be the next king of Israel. King Saul's dynasty would end upon his death. His son would not be the king after his death. This was made known to Saul by the prophet Samuel but he refused to accept it. He even tried to kill David because of it. These wicked men also refused to accept the operation, i.e. the action or doing of the LORD. No matter what King Saul did in order to kill David, the LORD was always many steps ahead of him. He could not succeed even with his elite army hunting David like a wild animal. They were wilful. They knew they were fighting and resisting the work and will of God but they were bent on doing it because of their self centred reasons.

David concluded that the LORD would destroy them. The Hebrew word "destroy" means to pull down and break into pieces. This is a very strong word to describe God's dealing with these wicked men. It would be complete destruction. David added the phrase "and not build them up" immediately after because he wanted the LORD to keep them down and not allow them to rise again. King Saul's kingdom did not rise again and his lineage ended upon the deaths of his sons.

David's imprecatory prayer or psalm was not for personal vengeance. He cried because wicked men stood in the way of the LORD's work being done on earth. They were going against God when they tried to stop David. They were not ignorant of God's truth. They were deliberate in their attack against God. They knew that to attack David was to attack God, yet they continued their attack. God's justice prevailed and the wicked were punished. This psalm might be personal in nature but it has eternal significance. God's plan of salvation for mankind was at stake.

To be continued