

Psalm 142

“Lord Hear Our Cry”

Introduction

During this month of August, we have been reading and listening to messages from the Old Testament book of Psalms. Today is the third message.

When I was a child, I absolutely hated the summer vacation homework that was assigned to me. I tended to procrastinate and then spent the last week of the summer vacation feeling overwhelmed and wondering why I had to do homework when I wanted to enjoy my summer vacation. I was especially bad at math, and I remember crying as I struggled with it. It's at times like this when I feel like asking God for help. But, I sometimes wonder if God hears me and will really help me. Even after I became a Christian, there were times when I wondered if God would listen to me and really solve my problems. I'm sure you have times when you have wondered the same thing. In Psalm 142, David is faced with a situation that is so much greater than my summer homework struggle, that it doesn't even compare. For David it was a life or death situation. How did God lead David? Today, we will read Psalm 142.

Psalm 142

- ¹ With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.
- ² I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.
- ³ When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.
- ⁴ Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul.
- ⁵ I cry to you, O LORD; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.”
- ⁶ Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!
- ⁷ Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.

This is the Word of the Living God. Amen.

I would like to share with you three points from this Psalm. First, David asked the Lord for help in the midst of his hardship. We, too, should look to the Lord, first and foremost. Secondly, the Lord is attentive to those who believe in Him. At all times, He will be with those who trust in Him. Thirdly, the Lord is the only one who can save us. We will look together at how he does this. The three points can be summarized as: 1) Rely on the Lord, 2) The Lord will be with us, and 3) The Lord will save us.

David asked the Lord for help when he faced hardship. We, too, should go to the Lord, first and foremost. Psalm 142 is in the second half of the Book of Psalms. Psalm 146 to 150, all begin and end with “hallelujah,” praising the Lord. However, Psalm 139 to 145, which precede Psalm 146 to 150, are a series of psalms in which David appeals to the Lord God about his suffering, sorrow, and struggles. Psalm 142 is one of these psalms.

This Psalm is entitled, “*A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.*” Psalm 57 has the same title. We could say that this is a psalm that was sung when David was in the same situation. David's experience in the cave is found in 1 Samuel 22-24. David was

servant Saul, the king of Israel. However, King Saul wanted to kill David, and he made this intention known to his son Jonathan and to his servants. Is this because David had sinned against King Saul in some way? No, not at all. Saul felt that the Lord God was with David and that David, who had even married Saul's daughter, was a threat to his kingship. Saul was jealous of David and wanted to kill him. David escaped from Saul and fled to a cave called Adullam. He later escaped to a cave in a place called Engedi. The psalm that was sung there is Psalm 142.

First, let's look at verses 1 and 2.

142:1, 2. With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD. ²I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.

In this psalm, David lifts up his voice, cries out, and pours out his grief and suffering before the Lord God. David had served Saul, the king, faithfully. The Lord was with David as he defeated the Philistine army led by the giant Goliath. God had used this to bring victory to Israel. But because of this, David's life was threatened. David did the right thing, but he was threatened with death. David pours out his sorrow and suffering before the Lord and asks for mercy.

142:3. When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.

David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel, and the Spirit of the Lord was with David. He was led by the Lord and fought valiantly. However, even though David was this kind of a man, he currently felt as if his spirit was weak. In this condition, David himself does not know what path he will take. What he does know for sure is that, under Saul's command, the servants are setting traps and trying to catch him. But David says, "You know my way, even when my spirit faints within me." The Lord God knew the path he was going to take, even when his heart was grieving and suffering because his life was in danger. In the midst of the crisis, David did not despair, nor did he rely on his own wisdom. He asked the Lord God for help.

The Psalmist reminds us of the blessedness and importance of asking and relying on the Lord alone for help. There are many such Psalms. Psalm 1:2, 3 says, "Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." Psalm 28:7 declares, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him." And, Psalm 32:10, "Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord." Thus, the psalmist invites the reader to trust in the Lord, no matter what the circumstances.

I myself had an incident that reminded me that relying on the Lord is the best thing to do. I was having a cup of tea in the church office with a lay leader of a church in New York, of which I was a member. While we were talking, a man suddenly opened the door and walked in. He said he needed to talk to the church leader, but he wanted me to be there too, so I stayed in the room to listen to what he had to say. I could see the anger in his eyes, and he looked like he was about to explode. He seemed to have a lot of anger about his wife and children, and about his work. The lay leader responded calmly, but the man became more aggressive and I began to feel threatened. I thought it would be better to call the police. The man raised his fists as though he was going to hit somebody, but the lay leader stood firm and said, "We can't solve this on our own,

but the Lord will certainly be able to solve it. Let's pray together right now." When the angry man heard those words, he loosened his clenched fists and leaned his arm against the lay leader. We sat him down in a chair, relaxed him, and had a moment of prayer for him, after which he had a cup of coffee and left. The leader told me afterwards, "You can fight anger with anger, but that would not be right. God is the only one who can solve the real problem. We have to trust Him." To this day I remember that incident.

David relied on the Lord alone in the midst of his difficulties and suffering. Should we not also do the same? We have problems that we cannot solve by our own strength. When we try to solve these problems with our own strength and ability, we will fail and fall into self-pity. Let us stop struggling and rely on the Lord and ask Him for help. We should do this because He is the one who will surely lead us to the solution of our problems at the time He determines. Let us rely on the Lord alone.

The Lord is attentive to those who believe in him, and he is always with those who trust in him. Look at verse 4,

142:4. "Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul."

David pours out his heart in prayer to the Lord. *"There is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul."* But actually, this was not the case. David's wife, Michal, protected David by letting him escape when her father, King Saul, tried to kill him. Jonathan, the son of King Saul, loved David and defended him against his father. But now, David was in a cave, away from the people who had protected him. There were people who loved David and helped him. However, David was forced to tackle many things alone during this time. Immediately after his escape, David fled alone to Ahimelech, a priest in the city of Nob, where he received consecrated bread because he was hungry, and was given Goliath's sword for protection. But then, he fled to Achish, king of Gath, a city of the Philistines, who were Israel's enemies. The king's servants found him easily, but he managed to escape by pretending to have lost his mind. David had to go through this crisis alone. So, David says, *"there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me, no one cares for my soul."* Also, David prays, *"Look to the right and see."* The word "right" is a reference to what we trust in and rely on the most. In Japanese, we have the expression, "Who is the right hand man?" In Psalm 16, David says, *" . . . because [the Lord] is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken."* But now, David is lamenting that there is no one on whom he can rely.

Like David, I'm sure there are situations in your life in which you want someone to be with you, but you have to face them alone. Under the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have had to tackle tasks by myself that I used to do as a team. No doubt, we have worries and conflicts that we would like to share with someone and have them listen to us. Instead, we are alone and sometimes face loneliness. David was also in such a situation. However, in the midst of his loneliness and danger, David prayed to the Lord God. He "looked to the right" and asked the Lord to be with me. The Lord heard David's lament and was with him.

There is another man who experienced the same kind of loneliness as David. It was our Savior, Jesus Christ. The night before His crucifixion, He was alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying to God the Father, while His disciples were told to pray at a distance. However, they could not stay awake and pray. They fell asleep. Jesus prayed to God the Father that *"if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."* The cup refers to the

wrath of God that Jesus was about to endure by suffering on the cross. Jesus prayed to God the Father, asking if there was no other way. But, Jesus also prayed that God's will would be done. The Father's will was to crucify Jesus for our sake. And so, Jesus went to the cross. He was lonely. But in his deep distress, God was with him.

In this current situation of the pandemic, you may find yourself in solitary situations more often, perhaps working alone, or struggling alone with a task. When you feel that you need someone to solve the situation or to help you, the feelings of loneliness may be even stronger. However, even in the midst of your loneliness, difficulties, and struggles, the Lord is with you. He is at your right hand! God has sent his Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him. The Holy Spirit is the "Helper". He is the one who knows our struggles and hears our groans. No matter how lonely we are or how difficult the situation, God is with us in the form of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, no matter what we are going through, let us first pray to the Lord who is with us. He is the one who gives better answers and solutions than anyone else, and He is the one who changes us.

The Lord is with us. And He is the only one who can truly save us. Look at verse 5.

142:5. *"I cry to you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'"*

David was experiencing loneliness in the cave, but he cried out to the Lord, *"You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."* The prophet Samuel spoke of David as *"a man after the Lord's own heart"* in 1 Samuel 13:14. True to Samuel's words, David's life was one of seeking and relying on the Lord. David confessed that the Lord was his only refuge to run back to and to protect and guide him no matter what. He also confessed that the Lord was his portion in the land of the living. David was blessed with a good friend, a wife, etc., but what he valued more than anything else was his relationship with the Lord God. It was a declaration that the Lord God was the best thing in the world for David.

Look at verses 6 and 7.

142:6, 7. *Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! 7 Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.*

David asked the Lord to deliver him from the hands of his persecutors. This is because King Saul and his men were after David's life. Then, in verse 7, he prayed that he would be brought out of prison. David is in a cave and not in a prison. But, the fact that he is not free and is being hunted and threatened with death, even though he has not sinned, could be seen as his soul being in prison. He prays to be rescued in order that he might rejoice and give thanks to the Lord. The psalm closes with these words: *"The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me."* Even though he is trapped in the prison of his soul, David does not lose hope that God will always be with him, deliver him from this situation, and gather those who share his heart.

Later, David encountered Saul in the cave of Engedi. However, David did not try to kill Saul. David did not take revenge on Saul, because Saul was the Lord's anointed one. As David said in 1 Samuel 24:6, he would never *"put out [his] hand against . . . the Lord's anointed."* Saul later died a horrible death in the battle against the Philistines. David then became the king of Israel.

The Lord God saved David. He rescued him from the prison of his soul. And, He will save us, too.

Can we be saved from anything? God saves us from "death caused by sin." When I was saved, I keenly sensed that God had saved me from the prison of sin and death. Before I was saved, I got into trouble with my roommate about a car and ended up in debt for about 600,000 yen. I was in my mid-twenties, so 600,000 yen was more than I could afford to pay off by myself. I was desperate. My roommate, with whom I was in trouble, had taken me to church and I had received a Bible. One night, the roommate got into more debt with me. Just when I thought there was no hope, my hand went to the computer and I typed in "words from the Bible". What came up on the computer screen was Matthew 17:20. For the first time in my life, I prayed, "God of the Bible, if you are the true God, show yourself to me." Immediately after that, I felt a strange sense of peace in my heart. My troubles were still unresolved, and they were getting worse, but I knew at that moment that I was saved from them, from the prison of my sins, and from death. After that, I picked up my Bible and learned how Jesus paid for all my sins on the cross. It took me four years, but I was able to pay off the entire debt.

Brothers and sisters, in Psalm 142, David prayed to the Lord God to deliver his soul from prison. And, God worked on David's behalf. God has delivered us from sin and death. How is that? Through our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Lord God sent His beloved Son, Jesus, into the world. He was crucified on the cross to pay for our sins and to save us from death caused by our sin. He was resurrected on the third day and proclaimed victory over death.

We should praise Jesus Christ for hearing our lamentations, saving us from sin and death, and inviting us to rest in God. Let us repent of our sins daily and rely on Jesus. Just as David always relied on God for help, when we rely on God for help, we can be assured that we will not be shaken in any time of crisis.

Let's pray.

"Our beloved Father. Throughout Psalm 142, we have seen that you were with David in his time of sorrow, always watching over him and saving him. I thank you from the bottom of my heart that you also save us by always being attentive to us and for giving us your Holy Spirit. May we now abide in your peace and rest. Give us the faith to rely on you, like David, without wavering at any time. You alone can set us free from the sin that is in our hearts and in the world. We thank you that you sent your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin and death, by dying on the cross. We are like sheep that easily go astray. Help us listen to your call and walk toward you. We offer this prayer in the name of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."