

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6, 2022

PSALM 143

THERE ARE LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF PRAYERS RECORDED IN THE BIBLE. EACH OF THEM ADDS TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT PRAYER IS AND HOW GOD ANSWERS THE PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE. THROUGH THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM PRAYING FOR LOT WE LEARN PERSISTENCE AND BOLDNESS IN PRAYER. ELIJAH'S PRAYER AT MT. CARMEL REMINDS US TO PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE. HANNAH'S PRAYER AND JOSHUA'S PRAYER REMIND US THAT SINCE GOD IS ALMIGHTY, WE SHOULDN'T BE AFRAID TO PRAY FOR THINGS THAT ARE SPECTACULAR OR EVEN HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE WORDS, "YOUR WILL BE DONE," FROM JESUS' PRAYER ON THE NIGHT HE WAS BETRAYED TEACH US TO PRAY WITH HUMILITY. WE MAKE OUR REQUESTS KNOWN TO GOD BUT THEN WE HUMBLY ASK HIM TO DO WHAT IS BEST. AND THE APOSTLE PAUL'S PRAYER THAT THE LORD WOULD REMOVE HIS THORN IN THE FLESH REMINDS US THAT ALTHOUGH GOD ALWAYS ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS, HE DOESN'T ALWAYS ANSWER THEM THE WAY WE HOPE HE WILL.

UNLIKE SOME OF THE OTHER PSALMS WRITTEN BY DAVID, PSALM 143 DOESN'T TELL US THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH HE WROTE IT. IN THE GREEK TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE THAT SOME OF THE JEWS USED AT JESUS' TIME THERE IS A NOTE THAT THIS PSALM WAS WRITTEN WHEN DAVID WAS BEING HUNTED DOWN BY HIS SON, ABSALOM. REMEMBER THAT WAS ONE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF DAVID'S ADULTERY WITH BATHSHEBA. ALTHOUGH WE CAN'T SAY FOR SURE IT CERTAINLY FITS THE TONE AND MESSAGE OF THE PSALM. THE OTHER PIECE OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION WORTH NOTING IS THE DIVISION OF THE PSALM. AT THE END OF VERSE SIX THE HEBREW WORD "SELAH," APPEARS. IT MARKS A BREAK IN THE PSALM. IN VERSES 1-6 DAVID EXPRESSES HIS THOUGHTS LEADING UP TO HIS PRAYER. THEN IN VERSES 7-12 THE ACTUAL PRAYER IS RECORDED. BUT AGAIN, THROUGH THE WHOLE PSALM WE RECEIVE A GREAT LESSON ABOUT THE "HEART" OF PRAYER. DAVID SHOWS US A REPENTANT HEART, A TRUSTING HEART, AND A LONGING HEART.

EVEN IF DAVID WASN'T THINKING ABOUT A SPECIFIC SIN THAT HE HAD COMMITTED HIS WORDS WERE STILL AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF HIS NEED FOR FORGIVENESS. "O LORD, HEAR MY PRAYER, LISTEN TO MY CRY FOR MERCY; IN YOUR FAITHFULNESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS COME TO MY RELIEF. 2 DO NOT BRING YOUR SERVANT INTO JUDGMENT, FOR NO ONE LIVING IS RIGHTEOUS BEFORE YOU." EVEN BEFORE HE BEGAN HIS PRAYER DAVID ACKNOWLEDGED THE TRUTH ABOUT HIMSELF AND ANY OTHER PERSON WHO OFFERS A PRAYER TO GOD.

UNDERSTANDING THAT BASIC FACT ABOUT PRAYER SHEDS SOME LIGHT ON DAVID'S WORDS. FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE PSALM TO THE END HE BASES HIS PRAYER ON GOD'S MERCY, FAITHFULNESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. DAVID USED GOD'S COVENANT NAME, "LORD," FOUR TIMES IN THE PSALM. WE HEAR PHRASES LIKE, "YOUR UNFAILING LOVE," "FOR YOUR NAME'S SAKE," "IN YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS," AND "IN YOUR UNFAILING LOVE." DO YOU SEE THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH DAVID BUILT HIS PRAYER? THE **HEART** OF DAVID'S PRAYER IS A **REPENTANT HEART**. HE FULLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE ONLY REASON GOD HAD FOR ANSWERING HIS PRAYER WAS BECAUSE OF GOD'S MERCY, FAITHFULNESS, AND LOVE.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT OUR SINFUL NATURE THINKS IT CAN WALK PROUDLY INTO GOD'S PRESENCE AND DEMAND THAT HE LISTEN. SUCH PRAYERS DON'T ACKNOWLEDGE THE PLAIN TRUTH THAT OUR SINS SEPARATE US FROM GOD. ISAIAH WORDED IT WELL WHEN HE WROTE, "BUT YOUR INIQUITIES HAVE SEPARATED YOU FROM YOUR GOD; YOUR SINS HAVE HIDDEN HIS FACE FROM YOU, SO THAT HE WILL NOT HEAR." (ISAIAH 59:2) OR MAYBE OUR PRAYERS HAVE BEEN DEADENED BY A DIFFERENT PROBLEM. SATAN HAS CONVINCED US THAT GOD ONLY HEARS THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO ARE GOOD AND BEHAVE DECENTLY. THEN WE FAIL TO PRAY BECAUSE WE DON'T THINK GOD WILL LISTEN TO US. IN EITHER CASE WE NEED TO COME BACK TO THE TRUTH ABOUT WHY GOD LISTENS TO OUR PRAYERS. IT IS ONLY BECAUSE OF HIS MERCY AND LOVE SHOWN US IN CHRIST.

IN HIS SMALL CATECHISM MARTIN LUTHER DESCRIBED THE WONDERFUL TRUTH ABOUT WHY GOD ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS. IN HIS EXPLANATION OF "THE FIFTH PETITION," WHICH IS "AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US" HE WROTE, "WE PRAY IN THIS PETITION THAT OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN WOULD NOT LOOK UPON OUR SINS OR BECAUSE OF THEM DENY OUR PRAYERS; FOR WE ARE WORTHY OF NONE OF THE THINGS FOR WHICH WE ASK, NEITHER HAVE WE DESERVED THEM, BUT WE ASK THAT HE WOULD GIVE THEM ALL TO US BY GRACE; FOR WE DAILY SIN MUCH AND SURELY DESERVE NOTHING BUT PUNISHMENT." THAT DESCRIBES THE HEART OF PRAYER; IT IS A REPENTANT HEART.

BUT A REPENTANT HEART WILL BE LEFT IN DESPAIR IF IT DOESN'T FIND FORGIVENESS IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. DAVID LOOKED AHEAD WITH THE EYES OF FAITH TO THE TIME WHEN THE SAVIOR WOULD COME. HE BASED HIS CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER ON GOD'S UNDESERVED LOVE FOR SINNERS THAT WOULD BE REVEALED THROUGH THAT SAVIOR. WE LOOK BACK WITH EYES OF FAITH TO THE CROSS OF OUR SAVIOR. THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF JESUS OPENED GOD'S EARS TO OUR PRAYERS. THAT IS WHY WE NOW PRAY IN JESUS' NAME. WE ARE SAYING

TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER THAT IT IS ONLY BECAUSE OF JESUS THAT HE SHOULD LISTEN TO OUR PRAYER.

HEBREWS 4:16 GIVES US THIS ENCOURAGEMENT, "LET US THEN APPROACH THE THRONE OF GRACE WITH CONFIDENCE, SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP US IN OUR TIME OF NEED." AND EPHESIANS 3:12 ADDS THIS THOUGHT, "IN HIM AND THROUGH FAITH IN HIM WE MAY APPROACH GOD WITH FREEDOM AND CONFIDENCE." THE THRONE OF GOD IS A THRONE OF GRACE FROM WHICH THE ANSWERS TO OUR PRAYERS FLOW WHEN WE FIND OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IN CHRIST ALONE.

AS WE LET DAVID TEACH US ABOUT THE HEART OF PRAYER WE ALSO LEARN THAT PRAYER CALLS FOR A **TRUSTING HEART**. LISTEN AGAIN TO DAVID'S DESCRIPTION OF WHAT PROMPTED HIS PRAYER. "THE ENEMY PURSUES ME, HE CRUSHES ME TO THE GROUND; HE MAKES ME DWELL IN DARKNESS LIKE THOSE LONG DEAD. SO MY SPIRIT GROWS FAINT WITHIN ME; MY HEART WITHIN ME IS DISMAYED." AGAIN, IT IS THOSE VERSES THAT HAVE LED MANY PEOPLE TO BELIEVE THAT DAVID WAS ON THE RUN FROM ABSALOM.

IF THAT IS TRUE DAVID CERTAINLY WAS FACING A SHARP REMINDER OF HIS SIN AND GUILT. BUT IN THE MIDST OF HIS DESPERATE SITUATION DAVID TURNED HIS THOUGHTS TO GOD'S POWER. NOTHING THAT HE FACED WAS BEYOND GOD'S ABILITY TO HELP. DAVID RECALLED GOD'S TRACK RECORD. "I REMEMBER THE DAYS OF LONG AGO; I MEDITATE ON ALL YOUR WORKS AND CONSIDER WHAT YOUR HANDS HAVE DONE. 6 I SPREAD OUT MY HANDS TO YOU; MY SOUL THIRSTS FOR YOU LIKE A PARCHED LAND." DAVID COULD OPEN GOD'S WORD AND READ ABOUT THE GREAT THINGS GOD HAD DONE IN THE PAST. HE HAD CREATED THE WORLD. HE RESCUED THE ISRAELITES FROM SLAVERY IN EGYPT. HE MADE THE SUN STAND STILL FOR JOSHUA. HE HAD WON GREAT MILITARY VICTORIES FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. THROUGH HIS REFLECTIONS ON GOD'S POWER AND ABILITY TO HELP HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY ARE IN NEED DAVID REVEALED HIS TRUSTING HEART. HE WAS SAYING TO GOD, "AS I MEDITATE ON THE GREAT THINGS YOU HAVE DONE IN THE PAST, I AM CONFIDENT YOU CAN HANDLE THE PROBLEMS I AM NOW FACING."

MAYBE OUR NEEDS AREN'T AS SERIOUS OR SEVERE AS KING DAVID'S. BUT WHEN WE OFFER OUR PRAYERS TO GOD, TRUST IS STILL AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THEM. WE HAVE AN EVEN LONGER RECORD OF GOD'S POWER TO READ THAN DAVID DID. WE HAVE THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF GOD'S INTERACTION WITH HIS OLD TESTAMENT PEOPLE. AND WE CAN READ ABOUT GOD'S TRACK RECORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AS WELL. FOR A MOMENT THINK BACK TO

THE FAMOUS PRAYERS THAT I LISTED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SERMON. RECALLING THESE PRAYERS LEADS US TO HAVE A TRUSTING HEART LIKE DAVID.

IN ADDITION TO HIS CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S POWER TO HELP HIM DAVID EXPRESSED HIS TRUST IN GOD BASED ON THE RELATIONSHIP HE HAD WITH GOD. TWICE DAVID REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS GOD'S SERVANT. IN VERSES NINE AND TEN DAVID REFLECTED ON HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD, "RESCUE ME FROM MY ENEMIES, O LORD, FOR I HIDE MYSELF IN YOU. 10 TEACH ME TO DO YOUR WILL, FOR YOU ARE MY GOD; MAY YOUR GOOD SPIRIT LEAD ME ON LEVEL GROUND." WITH THOSE WORDS DAVID TEACHES US THE HEART OF PRAYER; IT IS A TRUSTING HEART.

THE BASIS FOR OUR PRAYERS IS THE SAME. IT IS BECAUSE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST THAT WE TRUST HE WILL ANSWER OUR PRAYERS. IN ROMANS 8:32 THE APOSTLE PAUL MENTIONED THIS TRUTH, "HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON, BUT GAVE HIM UP FOR US ALL—HOW WILL HE NOT ALSO, ALONG WITH HIM, GRACIOUSLY GIVE US ALL THINGS?" IN LIGHT OF THE FACT THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US HIS SON AS OUR SAVIOR WE CAN TRUST THAT HE WILL ALSO HEAR AND ANSWER OUR PRAYERS.

THREE MINISTERS WERE TALKING ABOUT PRAYER IN GENERAL AND THE APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE POSITIONS FOR PRAYER. AS THEY WERE TALKING, A TELEPHONE REPAIRMAN WAS WORKING ON THE PHONE SYSTEM IN THE BACKGROUND. ONE MINISTER SHARED THAT HE FELT THE KEY WAS IN THE HANDS. HE ALWAYS HELD HIS HANDS TOGETHER AND POINTED THEM UPWARD AS A FORM OF SYMBOLIC WORSHIP. THE SECOND SUGGESTED THAT REAL PRAYER WAS CONDUCTED ON YOUR KNEES. IT SHOWED HUMILITY BEFORE GOD. THE THIRD PASTOR SUGGESTED THAT THEY BOTH HAD IT WRONG--THE ONLY POSITION WORTHY OF PRAYER WAS TO PRAY WHILE STRETCHED OUT LYING FLAT ON YOUR FACE.

BY THIS TIME THE PHONE MAN COULDN'T STAY OUT OF THE CONVERSATION ANY LONGER. HE INTERJECTED, "I FOUND THAT THE MOST POWERFUL PRAYER I EVER MADE WAS WHILE I WAS DANGLING UPSIDE DOWN BY MY HEELS FROM A POWER POLE, SUSPENDED FORTY FEET ABOVE THE GROUND." WHEN WE PRAY LIKE THAT TELEPHONE REPAIRMAN DANGLING HELPLESS BEFORE GOD WE WILL FIND OURSELVES PRAYING WITH A TRUSTING HEART. WHICH AS DAVID SHOWS US IN PSALM 143 IS THE HEART OF PRAYER.

IN ADDITION TO A REPENTANT HEART AND A TRUSTING HEART DAVID ALSO REMINDS US IN THIS PSALM THAT A **LONGING HEART** IS A PART OF THE HEART OF PRAYER. AS WE READ THIS PSALM, WE QUICKLY SEE THAT DAVID WANTED GOD MORE THAN HE WANTED AN ANSWER TO HIS PRAYER. "ANSWER ME QUICKLY, O LORD; MY SPIRIT FAILS. DO NOT HIDE YOUR FACE

FROM ME OR I WILL BE LIKE THOSE WHO GO DOWN TO THE PIT. 8 LET THE MORNING BRING ME WORD OF YOUR UNFAILING LOVE, FOR I HAVE PUT MY TRUST IN YOU. SHOW ME THE WAY I SHOULD GO, FOR TO YOU I LIFT UP MY SOUL. 9 RESCUE ME FROM MY ENEMIES, O LORD, FOR I HIDE MYSELF IN YOU. 10 TEACH ME TO DO YOUR WILL, FOR YOU ARE MY GOD; MAY YOUR GOOD SPIRIT LEAD ME ON LEVEL GROUND. 11 FOR YOUR NAME'S SAKE, O LORD, PRESERVE MY LIFE; IN YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, BRING ME OUT OF TROUBLE. 12 IN YOUR UNFAILING LOVE, SILENCE MY ENEMIES; DESTROY ALL MY FOES, FOR I AM YOUR SERVANT." ALTHOUGH DAVID WAS ASKING FOR HELP AND LOOKING TO GOD TO RESCUE HIM FROM HIS ENEMIES HIS BOTTOM-LINE DESIRE WAS TO BE CLOSER TO GOD.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THIS IS A PART OF PRAYER THAT ALL OF US STRUGGLE TO PRACTICE. WE CAN BECOME SO WORRIED ABOUT OUR NEED THAT WE FORGET THAT THE BEST ANSWER TO ANY PRAYER IS A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. AND THAT IS THE ANSWER THAT GOD ALWAYS PROMISES TO GIVE TO OUR PRAYERS. AS WE OFFER OUR PRAYERS TO GOD AND LISTEN TO HIS ANSWERS THROUGH HIS WORD AND THE SACRAMENTS, HE WILL DRAW US INTO A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER? IT IS A HEART-TO-HEART TALK WITH GOD. AND WHAT IS THE HEART OF PRAYER. DAVID TELLS US IN PSALM 143. THE HEART OF PRAYER IS A REPENTANT HEART, A TRUSTING HEART, AND A LONGING HEART. MAY GOD CREATE SUCH HEARTS IN EACH OF US. AMEN.