

PSALM CXLII

TITLE.—Maschil of David. *This Maschil is written for our instruction. It teaches us principally by example how to order our prayer in times of distress. Such instruction is among the most needful, practical, and effectual parts of our spiritual education. He who has learned how to pray has been taught the most useful of the arts and sciences. The disciples said unto the Son of David, "Lord, teach us to pray"; and here David gives us a valuable lesson by recording his own experience as to supplication from beneath a cloud.*

A Prayer when he was in the cave. *He was in one of his many lurking places, either Engedi, Adullam, or some other lone cavern wherein he could conceal himself from Saul and his bloodhounds. Caves make good closets for prayer; their gloom and solitude are helpful to the exercise of devotion. Had David prayed as much in his palace as he did in his cave, he might never have fallen into the act which brought such misery upon his later days.*

SUBJECT.—*There can be little doubt that this song dates from the days when Saul was sorely persecuting David, and David himself was in soul-trouble, probably produced by that weakness of faith which led him to associate with heathen princes. His fortunes were evidently at their lowest, and, what was worse, his repute had fearfully fallen; yet he displayed a true faith in God, to whom he made known his pressing sorrows. The gloom of the cave is over the Psalm, and yet as if standing at the mouth of it the prophet-poet sees a bright light a little beyond.*

EXPOSITION.

I CRIED unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.

2 I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble.

3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.

4 I looked on *my* right hand, and beheld, but *there was* no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.

5 I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my refuge *and* my portion in the land of the living.

6 Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.

7 Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

1. "*I cried unto the LORD with my voice.*" It was a cry of such anguish that he remembers it long after, and makes a record of it. In the loneliness of the cave he could use his voice as much as he pleased; and therefore he made its gloomy vaults echo with his appeals to heaven. When there was no soul in the cavern seeking his blood, David with all his soul was engaged in seeking his God. He felt it a relief to his heart to use his voice in his pleadings with Jehovah. There was a voice in his prayer when he used his voice for prayer: it was not *vox et præterea nihil*. It was a prayer *vivo corde* as well as *vivâ voce*. "*With my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.*" He dwells upon the fact that he spoke aloud in prayer; it was evidently well impressed upon his memory, hence he doubles the word and says, "with my voice; with my voice." It is well when our supplications are such that we find pleasure in looking back upon them. He that is cheered by the memory of his prayers will pray again. See how the good man's appeal was to Jehovah only: he did not go round about to men, but he ran straight forward to Jehovah, his God. What true wisdom is here! Consider how the Psalmist's prayer grew into shape as he proceeded with it. He first poured out his natural longings,—

"I cried;" and then he gathered up all his wits and arranged his thoughts,—*"I made supplication."* True prayers may differ in their diction, but not in their direction: an impromptu cry and a preconceived supplication must alike ascend towards the one prayer-hearing God, and he will accept each of them with equal readiness. The intense personality of the prayer is noteworthy: no doubt the Psalmist was glad of the prayers of others, but he was not content to be silent himself. See how everything is in the first person,—*"I cried with my voice; with my voice did I make my supplication."* It is good to pray in the plural—*"Our Father,"* but in times of trouble we shall feel forced to change our note into *"Let this cup pass from me."*

2. *"I poured out my complaint before him."* His inward meditation filled his soul: the bitter water rose up to the brim; what was to be done? He must pour out the wormwood and the gall, he could not keep it in; he lets it run away as best it can, that so his heart may be emptied of the fermenting mixture. But he took care *where* he outpoured his complaint, lest he should do mischief, or receive an ill return. If he poured it out before man he might only receive contempt from the proud, hard-heartedness from the careless, or pretended sympathy from the false; and therefore he resolved upon an outpouring before God alone, since *he* would pity and relieve. The word is scarcely *"complaint"*; but even if it be so we may learn from this text that our complaint must never be of a kind that we dare not bring before God. We may complain *to* God, but not *of* God. When we complain it should not be before men, but before God alone. *"I shewed before him my trouble."* He exhibited his griefs to one who could assuage them: he did not fall into the mistaken plan of so many who publish their sorrows to those who cannot help them. This verse is parallel with the first; David first pours out his complaint, letting it flow forth in a natural, spontaneous manner, and then afterwards he makes a more elaborate show of his affliction; just as in the former verse he began with crying, and went on to *"make supplication."* Praying men pray better as they proceed. Note that we do not show our trouble before the Lord that *he* may see it, but that *we* may see *him*. It is for *our* relief, and not for his information that we make plain statements concerning our woes: it does us much good to set out our sorrow in order, for much of it vanishes in the process, like a ghost which will not abide the light of day; and the rest loses much of its terror, because the veil of mystery is removed by a clear and deliberate stating of the trying facts. Pour out your thoughts and you will see what they are; show your trouble and the extent of it will be known to you: let all be done before the Lord, for in comparison with his great majesty of love the trouble will seem to be as nothing.

3. *"When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path."* The bravest spirit is sometimes sorely put to it. A heavy fog settles down upon the mind, and the man seems drowned and smothered in it; covered with a cloud, crushed with a load, confused with difficulties, conquered by impossibilities. David was a hero, and yet his spirit sank: he could smite a giant down, but he could not keep himself up. He did not know his own path, nor feel able to bear his own burden. Observe his comfort: he looked away from his own condition to the ever-observant, all-knowing God; and solaced himself with the fact that all was known to his heavenly Friend. Truly it is well for us to know that God knows what we do not know. We lose our heads, but God never closes his eyes: our judgments lose their balance, but the eternal mind is always clear.

"In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me." This the Lord knew at the time, and gave his servant warning of it. Looking back, the sweet singer is rejoiced that he had so gracious a Guardian, who kept him from unseen dangers. Nothing is hidden from God; no secret snare can hurt the man who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, for he shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The use of concealed traps is disgraceful to our enemies, but they care little to what tricks they resort for their evil purposes. Wicked men must find some exercise for their malice, and therefore when they dare not openly assail they will privately ensnare. They watch the gracious man to see where his haunt is, and there they set their trap; but they do it with great caution, avoiding all observation, lest their victim being forewarned should escape their toils. This is a great trial, but the Lord is greater still, and makes us to walk safely in the midst of danger, for he knows us and our enemies, our way and the snare which is laid in it. Blessed be his name.

4. *"I looked on my right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know*

me." He did not miss a friend for want of looking for him, nor for want of looking in a likely place. Surely some helper would be found in the place of honour; some one would stand at his right hand to undertake his defence. He looked steadily, and saw all that could be seen, for he "beheld"; but his anxious gaze was not met by an answering smile. Strange to say, all were strange to David. He had known many, but none would know him. When a person is in ill odour it is wonderful how weak the memories of his former friends become: they quite forget, they refuse to know. This is a dire calamity. It is better to be opposed by foes than to be forsaken by friends. When friends look for us they affect to have known us from our birth, but when we look for friends it is wonderful how little we can make them remember: the fact is that in times of desertion it is not true that no man did know us, but no man would know us. Their ignorance is wilful. "*Refuge failed me.*" Where in happier days I found a ready harbour I now discovered none at all. My place of flight had taken to flight. My refuge gave me a refusal. "*No man cared for my soul.*" Whether I lived or died was no concern of anybody's. I was cast out as an outcast. No soul cared for my soul. I dwelt in No-man's land, where none cared to have me, and none cared about me. This is an ill-plaint—no place where to lay our head, and no head willing to find us a place. How pleased were his enemies to see the friend of God without a friend! How sad was he to be utterly deserted in his utmost need! Can we not picture David in the cave, complaining that even the cave was not a refuge for him, for Saul had come even there? Hopeless was his looking out, we shall soon see him looking up.

5. "*I cried unto thee, O LORD.*" As man would not regard him, David was driven to Jehovah, his God. Was not this a gain made out of a loss? wealth gained by a failure? Anything which leads us to cry unto God is a blessing to us. This is the second time that in this short Psalm we find the same record, "*I cried unto thee, O LORD*": the saintly man is evidently glad to remember his cry and its results. We hear often of the bitter cry of outcast London, here is another bitter cry, and it comes from an outcast, in wretched lodgings, forgotten by those who should have helped him. "*I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.*" There is a sort of progressive repetition all through this sacred song; he *cried* first, but he *said* afterwards: his cry was bitter, but his saying was sweet; his cry was sharp and short, but his saying was fresh and full. It gives a believer great pleasure to remember his own believing speeches: he may well desire to bury his unbelieving murmurings in oblivion, but the triumphs of grace in working in him a living faith, he will not dream of forgetting. What a grand confession of faith was this! David spoke to God, and of God—"Thou art my refuge." Not thou hast provided me a refuge, but thou, thyself, art my refuge. He fled to God alone; he hid himself beneath the wings of the Eternal. He not only believed this, but said it, and practised it. Nor was this all; for David, when banished from his portion in the promised land, and cut off from the portion of goods which he by right inherited, found his portion in God, yea, God was his portion. This was so not only in reference to a future state, but here among living men. It is sometimes easier to believe in a portion in heaven than in a portion upon earth: we could die more easily than live, at least we think so. But there is no living in the land of the living like living upon the living God. For the man of God to say these precious things in the hour of his dire distress was a grand attainment. It is easy to prate bravely when we dwell at ease, but to speak confidently in affliction is quite another matter.

Even in this one sentence we have two parts, the second rising far above the first. It is something to have Jehovah for our refuge, but it is everything to have him for our portion. If David had not *cried* he would not have *said*; and if the Lord had not been his *refuge* he would never have been his *portion*. The lower step is as needful as the higher; but it is not necessary always to stop on the first round of the ladder.

6. "*Attend unto my cry.*" Men of God look upon prayer as a reality, and they are not content without having an audience with God; moreover, they have such confidence in the Lord's condescending grace, that they hope he will even attend to that poor broken prayer which can only be described as a cry. "*For I am brought very low,*" and therefore all the prayer I can raise is a mournful cry. This is his argument with God: he is reduced to such a sad condition that if he be not rescued he will be ruined. Gracious men may not only be low, but very low; and this should not be a reason for their doubting the efficacy of their prayers, but rather a plea

with the Lord why they should have special attention. "*Deliver me from my persecutors.*" If he did not get out of their hands, they would soon kill him out of hand, and as he could not himself effect an escape, he cried to God, "deliver me." "*For they are stronger than I.*" As he before found a plea in his sadness, so now in his feebleness: Saul and his courtiers were in power, and could command the aid of all who sought royal favour; but poor David was in the cave, and every Nabal girded at him. Saul was a monarch, and David a fugitive; Saul had all the forms of law on his side, while David was an outlaw: so that the prayer before us comes from the weak, who proverbially go to the wall,—a good place to go to if they turn their faces to it in prayer, as Hezekiah did in his sickness. The Lord is wont to take the side of the oppressed, and to show his power by baffling tyrants; David's supplication was therefore sure to speed. In these sentences we see how explicitly the man of God described his case in his private communings with his Lord: in real earnest he poured out his complaint before him, and showed before him his trouble.

7. "*Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name.*" That God may be glorified is another notable plea for a suppliant. Escaped prisoners are sure to speak well of those who give them liberty. Soul-emanicipation is the noblest form of liberation, and calls for the loudest praise: he who is delivered from the dungeons of despair is sure to magnify the name of the Lord. We are in such a prison that only God himself can bring us out of it, and when he does so he will put a new song into our mouths. The cave was not half such a dungeon to David's body as persecution and temptation made for his soul. To be exiled from the godly is worse than imprisonment, hence David makes it one point of his release that he would be restored to church fellowship—"The righteous shall compass me about." Saints gather around a child of God when his Father smiles upon him; they come to hear his joyful testimony, to rejoice with him, and to have their own faith encouraged. All the true believers in the twelve tribes were glad to rally to David's banner when the Lord enlarged his spirit; they glorified God for him and with him and through him. They congratulated him, consorted with him, crowned him, and championed him. This was a sweet experience for righteous David, who had for awhile come under the censure of the upright. He bore their smiting with patience, and now he welcomes their sanction with gratitude. "*For thou shalt deal bountifully with me.*" God's bountiful dealing is sure to bring with it the sympathy and alliance of all the favourites of the Great King. What a change from looking for a friend and finding none to this enthusiastic concourse of allies around the man after God's own heart! When we can begin a Psalm with crying, we may hope to close it with singing. The voice of prayer soon awakens the voice of praise.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Title.—He calls this prayer *Maschil*, "a Psalm of instruction," because of the good lessons he had himself learned in the cave, learned on his knees, and so learned that he desired to teach others.—*Matthew Henry.*

Title.—"A prayer when he was in the cave." Every part of this Psalm shows the propriety of its inscription or title. He expressly mentions his being in a place where he was entirely shut up, where he saw no possible method of escaping, as having no friends that dared to own him and appear for his deliverance, and when every one seemed to desert him, and to have abandoned all care of his safety and life. This he pathetically describes, and in such terms as cannot fail to move the tender affections of every one who considers them. On the first sense of his danger, shut up in a cave, surrounded by three thousand chosen soldiers, closely observed by a watchful enemy who would spare no art or pains to apprehend him, he seems almost to have despaired of himself, and declares that his spirit is quite overwhelmed with the greatness of his distress. At length, recollecting his principles, and the promises that God had made him, he earnestly supplicates the protection of God, and assures himself that he should yet praise God for his deliverance, and that good men should share his joy, and encompass the altar of God with thanksgiving for the mercy that he had shown him.—*Samuel Chandler.*

Title.—"The cave." Leaving our horses in charge of some Arabs, and taking

one for our guide, we started for the cave now known as Mughâret Khureitûn, which is believed to be the cave Adullam, having a fearful gorge below, gigantic cliffs above, and the path winding along a narrow shelf of the rock. At length, from a great rock hanging on the edge of the shelf, we entered by a long leap a low window which opened into the perpendicular face of the cliff. We were then within the traditional hold of David, and, creeping half doubled through a narrow crevice for a few rods, we stood beneath the dark vault of the first grand chamber of this mysterious and oppressive cavern, 1 Sam. xxii. 1, 2; 2 Sam. xxiii. 13—17. Our whole collection of lights did little more than make the damp darkness visible. After groping about as long as we had time to spare, we returned to the light of day, fully convinced that, with David and his lion-hearted followers inside, all the strength of Israel under Saul could not have forced an entrance—would not have even attempted it.—*William M. Thompson.*

Verse 1.—"I cried unto the LORD." Thou hast posted me over to no deputy for the hearing of my prayer, neither dost thou require that I should bring a spokesman for the presenting of it; but thou hast commanded me to come myself, and to come to thee thyself.—*Sir Richard Baker on the Lord's Prayer.*

Verse 1.—"With my voice." The Lord needs not the tongue to be an interpreter between him and the hearts of his children. He that hears without ears can interpret prayers though not uttered by the tongue. Our desires are cries in the ears of the Lord of hosts. The vehemency of the affections may sometimes cause the outcrying of the voice; but alas! without this it is but a tinkling cymbal . . . There is a use of words in prayer, to excite, and convey, and give vent to, affection: Hosea xiv. 2, "Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." The prophet doth not only prescribe that they should take affections, but take with them words.—*Thomas Manton.*

Verse 2.—"I poured out my complaint before him." Literally, my meditation; that is—what so much occupied my thoughts at the time I expressed aloud. The word "*complaint*" does not express the idea. The meaning is, not that he *complained* of God or of man; but that his mind *meditated* on his condition.—*Albert Barnes.*

Verse 2.—"I poured out," etc. I did it fully, and fervently, and confidently.—*Matthew Henry.*

Verse 2.—"Poured out . . . before him." Those words teach us that in prayer we should not try to keep anything back from God, but should show him all that is in our hearts, and that in his presence in our closet, with the door shut, but not before men. The Carmelite adds that there is much force in the words "*with my voice*," twice repeated (as in Heb., A.V., Vulgate, etc.) to show us that we ought to pray to God directly for ourselves, and in person, and not to be contented with an *Ora pro me* addressed to some one else.—*Cassiodorus and Ayyuan, in Neale and Littledale.*

Verse 2.—"I shewed before him my trouble." Be very particular in secret prayer, both as to sins, wants, and mercies . . . Be not ashamed to open out all thy necessities. David argues because he is "poor and needy;" four several times he presses his wants and exigencies before God, like an earnest but holy beggar (Ps. xl. 17; lxx. 5; lxxxvi. 1; cix. 22). He "*shewed before him*" his trouble. He presents "*before*" God his ragged condition, and spreads open his secret wounds; as Job said, he "would order" his "cause before him": Job xxiii. 4. . . Before God we may speak out our minds fully, and name the persons that afflict, affront, and trouble us; and woe to them that a child of God upon a mature judgment names in prayer! I find not that such a prayer in Scripture ever returned empty . . . A great reason why we reap so little benefit in prayer, is because we rest too much in generals; and if we have success, it is but dark, so that often we cannot tell what to make of the issues of prayer. Besides, to be particular in our petitions would keep the spirit much from wandering when we are intent upon a weighty cause, and the progress of the soul in grace would manifest its gradual success in prayer.—*Samuel Lee* (1625—1691), in "*The Morning Exercises.*"

Verse 2.—The committing of our cause to God is at once our duty, our safety, and our ease.—*Abraham Wright.*

Verse 3.—"When my spirit was overwhelmed within me." "When even my spirit (the higher faculty) is wrapped in darkness upon me;" that is, when even my spirit

(*ruach*), which ought to elevate my *soul* (*nephesh*) falls heavily upon me, as in a swoon.

“When heavy, like a veil of woe,
My spirit on me lay.”

What is here said of the *spirit*, is oftener predicated of the *soul*, the seat of the passions. See Psalms xlii. 6; xliii. 5; cxxxi. 2. The dejection of the *spirit* represents a still more sorrowful and downcast condition, than the fainting of the *soul*. See Psalm cxliii. 3, 4, and compare our Lord's words, “My *soul* is troubled” (John xii. 27) with the Evangelist's statement, “Jesus was troubled in spirit” (John xiii. 21; xi. 33).—*Christopher Wordsworth*.

Verse 3.—“When my spirit was overwhelmed within me.” Literally, in the muffling upon me of my spirit. When my spirit was so wrapped in trouble and gloom, so “muffled round with woe,” that I could not see the path before me, was distracted and unable to choose a line of conduct, “Thou (emphatic) knewest my path.”—A. S. Aglen, in “An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers,” 1884.

Verse 3.—I wish you much comfort from David's thought: “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.” The Lord is not withdrawn to a great distance, but his eye is upon you. He sees you not with the indifference of a mere spectator; but he observes with attention, he knows, he considers your path: yea, he appoints it, and every circumstance about it is under his direction. Your trouble began at the hour he saw best,—it could not come before; and he has marked the degree of it to a hair's breadth, and its duration to a minute. He knows likewise how your spirit is affected; and such supplies of grace and strength, and in such seasons as he sees needful, he will afford in due season. So that when things appear darkest, you shall still be able to say, Though chastened, not killed. Therefore hope in God, for you shall yet praise him.—*John Newton* (1725—1807), in “*Cardiphonia*.”

Verse 3.—“Thou knewest.”

From human eyes 'tis better to conceal
Much that I suffer, much I hourly feel;
But, oh, this thought can tranquilize and heal,
All, all is known to thee.

Nay, all by thee is ordered, chosen, planned,
Each drop that fills my daily cup, thy hand
Prescribes for ills, none else can understand,
All, all is known to thee.

Charlotte Elliott.

Verse 3.—Although we as Christians possess the full solution of the problem of suffering, yet we frequently find ourselves in the position of Job, in regard to this or that particular affliction. There are sorrows so far reaching, so universal; there are losses so absolute, and blows so terrible and inexplicable, that it seems for a time as if we were wrapped in thickest gloom, and as if the secret of the Lord had not been revealed. Why was this man stricken, and that man spared? Why was such and such a being, in whom so many hopes centred, or who had already realised so many pleasant expectations, why was he withdrawn? Why was that other person left, a useless encumbrance to earth? Why was that voice, which found echo in so many hearts, suddenly silenced? Why have I been smitten? Why have I lost that which rendered my moral life beautiful and useful? Oftentimes the soul seems lost for awhile in thoughts which overwhelm it, it loses its foothold, it tumbles about helplessly amid the deep waters of affliction. It seems as if all were over. Do not believe it. Remember Job; you cannot go to greater lengths of despair than he, and yet God had pity on him. There is much comfort for you in this example of indescribable suffering, exasperated to the highest degree, and yet pardoned and consoled. Cling to the memory of this blessed fact as to a cable of deliverance, a board or a plank amidst the shipwreck. And then remember that affliction forms part of God's plan, and that he also asks you to manifest ready and absolute confidence in him.—*E. De Pressensé, D.D.*, in “*The Mystery of Suffering*,” 1869.

Verse 3.—“They have privily laid a snare for me.” Snares on the right hand, and snares on the left: snares on the right hand, worldly prosperity; snares on the left hand, worldly adversity; snares on the right hand, flattery; snares on

the left hand, alarm. Do thou walk in the midst of the snares : depart not from the way : let neither flattery ensnare thee, nor alarm drive thee off it.—*Augustine*.

Verse 4.—"I looked on my right hand, and beheld." The first two verbs must be translated as imperatives, as in the margin of the English Bible. ["Look on the right hand, and see."] The right hand is mentioned as the post of a protector.—*Joseph Addison Alexander*.

Verse 4.—"I looked on my right hand." The allusion here, it is supposed, is to the observance of the ancient Jewish courts of judicature, in which the advocate, as well as the accuser, stood on the *right hand* of the accused (Psalm cx. 5). The Psalmist felt himself in the condition of one who had nobody to plead his cause, and to protect him in the dangerous circumstances in which he was placed.—*James Anderson's Note to Calvin in loc.*

Verse 4.—"There was no man that would know me." The fact that David, although surrounded by a band of loyal subjects, confesses to having no true friend, is to be understood similarly to the language of Paul when he says in Phil. ii. 20 : "I have no man like-minded." All human love, since sin has taken possession of humanity, is more or less selfish, and all fellowship of faith and of love imperfect ; and there are circumstances in life in which these dark sides make themselves felt overpoweringly, so that a man seems to himself to be perfectly isolated, and turns all the more urgently to God, who alone is able to supply the soul's want of some object to love, whose love is absolutely unselfish, and unchangeable, and unobscured, to whom the soul can confide without reserve whatever burdens it, and who not only honestly desires its good, but is able also to compass it in spite of every obstacle. Surrounded by bloodthirsty enemies, and misunderstood, or at least not thoroughly understood by his friends, David feels himself broken off from all created beings.—*Franz Delitzsch*.

Verse 4.—"There was no man that would know me." Teacheth us of what little estimation God's children be, with the world and worldly men.—*Thomas Wilcocks*.

Verse 4.—"There was no man that would know me." Persecution from the side of our enemies presses sorely, but abandonment by our friends, who should have stood by one's side as helpers and defenders, presses more sorely still.—*Taube, in Lange's Commentary*.

Verse 4.—Observe the beautiful opposition between "Thou knewest" (verse 3) and "no man would know me." "*Refuge failed me*,"—literally "*perished*" from me (Jer. xxv. 35 ; Amos ii. 14). But "thou hast been my *refuge* in the day of my trouble" ; Ps. lix. 16.—*Andrew Robert Fausset*.

Verses 4, 5.—"Refuge failed me. . . Thou art my refuge." Travellers tell us that they who are at the top of the Alps can see great showers of rain fall under them, but not one drop of it falls on them. They who have God for their portion are in a high tower, and thereby safe from all troubles and showers. A drift-rain of evil will beat in at the creature's windows, be they never so well pointed ; all the garments this world can make up cannot keep them that travel in such weather from being wet to the skin. No creature is able to bear the weight of its fellow-creature ; but as reeds, they break under the pressure, and as thorns, they run into the sides of those who lean on them. The bow drawn beyond its compass breaks in sunder, and the string wound above its strength snaps in pieces. Such are outward helps to all that trust to them in hardships.—*George Swinnock*.

Verses 4, 5.—"Refuge failed me. . . Thou art my refuge." Are there any among us to whom the world's face is quite changed, and the brooks of comfort in it are dried up, and they are so tossed, chased, and harassed in it that they have forgotten their resting-place ? Are any of you "become a stranger unto your brethren and an alien unto your mother's children" ? Ps. lxxix. 8. Is it grown such a strange world, that even "your own familiar friend, in whom you trusted, which did eat of your bread, hath lifted up his heel against you" ? (Ps. xli. 9) ; and that wherever you turn yourselves in it, to find rest and refuge, the door is shut in your face ? Here is refuge for you ; here is one open door ; come in, thou blessed of the Lord : "the Lord gathereth the outcasts of Israel" : Ps. cxlvii. 2. It seems the Lord minds to have you in : he is doing with you as a father with a stubborn son who ran away from his father's house, thinking to shift for himself among his friends, and not come back : the father sends peremptory word through them all, saying, "In whosoever house my son is skulking, presently turn him out of doors, and let none of you take him in ; and if he come to you give him not one night's lodging,

nay, let him not eat in your house." Wherefore is all this but just to get him back again to his father's house?—*Thomas Boston, 1676—1732.*

Verses 4, 5.—When all slighted him, when none took care of him; what doth David in this case? The words in verse 5 tell us what. "*I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.*" As if he had said, Upon these unkindnesses, disrespects, and slightings which I found in the world, I took occasion, yea, I was stirred in my spirit to cry unto thee, O Lord, and to say, "*Thou art my refuge,*" that is, then I made thee my refuge more than ever. Having made thee my choice in my best times, when men honoured and embraced me, I am much encouraged in these evil times when men regard me not, to shelter my weather-beaten self in thy name and power. When we have most friends in the world, then God is our best friend, but when the world hates us, and frowns upon us, especially when (as the prophet speaks of some, Isa. lxvi. 5) "our brethren hate us, and cast us out for the name's sake of God himself," saying, "Let the Lord be glorified," when 'tis thus with us (I say) our souls are even forced into the presence of God, to renew our interests in his love, and to assure our souls that we are accepted with him.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 5.—"I have cried unto thee, Jehovah, I have said," etc. I have cried and still cry; I have said and still say.—*Joseph Addison Alexander.*

Verse 5.—"I said." This imports, I. A REMEMBRANCE OF THE SOLEMN TRANSACTION, Ps. ciii. 18. This is a deed never to be forgotten, but always to be kept in remembrance. But, O ye who have said this, remember, 1. *What* you said. You said that God in Christ should be your refuge, that under the shade of his wings you hid yourselves, and that, renouncing all other refuges, as refuges of lies, you did betake yourselves to the covert of Christ's righteousness, and that there ye would abide for your portion; which was a formal acceptance of and laying hold on the covenant. 2. *To whom* you said it. To God in Christ speaking to you in the gospel-offer, and inviting you into the refuge. What men say to their superiors, they think themselves specially concerned to mind. And surely what ye have said to God, ye ought in a peculiar manner to remember, and awe your hearts with the consideration of the majesty of the party to whom ye said it, Ps. xvi. 2: "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord"; for he is not one with whom we may deal falsely. 3. *How* ye said it. Did ye not say it in your hearts, while God in Christ was held out as a refuge for you? And the language of the heart is plain language with a heart-searching God. Did not some of you say it with your mouths? and did not all communicants say it solemnly before the world, angels, and men, by their receiving the elements of bread and wine? 4. *Upon what grounds* you said it. Did you not see a necessity of a refuge for you, and a necessity of taking God in Christ for your refuge? Ye had rational grounds for it, and lasting grounds that can never fail; so that ye can never have ground to retract, nor shift about for another refuge. Jer. ii. 31. 5. *Where* ye said it. Remember the spot of ground where ye said it in prayer, where ye said it at the communion-table. Ps. xlii. 6. The stones of the place will be witnesses of your saying it. Josh. xxiv. 27.

II. A STANDING TO IT, without regretting that we said it, remembering what is said, John vi. 66—69; "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Men often repent what they have said, and therefore will not own that they have said it. But gracious souls will not repent their saying this, but will abide by it. If they were to make their choice a thousand times, having chosen God in Christ for their refuge and portion, they would not alter; Jer. iii. 19: "I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father; and shalt not turn away from me." Many alterations may be in men's circumstances in the world, but there can never be one that will afford ground for retracting this saying.

III. AN OWNING OF THE OBLIGATION OF IT: "*I said,*" and am obliged thereby to stand to it, "For I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back," Judg. xi. 35. God in Christ is yours, and ye are his by his own consent; ye are no more your own; ye have said the word, and must own that it is binding on you; and ye must beware that after vows ye make not enquiry. Whoever may pretend they have their choice yet to make of a refuge and portion to themselves, ye cannot:

ye are engaged already, and ye are not at liberty to hearken to any other proposals, any more than a woman who has already signed her contract with one man.

IV. A PROFESSING OF IT CONFIDENTLY without being ashamed of it : as though you should say, " I own it before all men, and am not ashamed of my choice." Antichrist allows some of his vassals to carry his mark in their right hand. Rev. xiii. 16. But all the followers of the Lamb have their mark on their foreheads, where it will not hide, Rev. xiv. 1. The world would put the people of God to shame on the head of their refuge and portion, as if they had made a foolish bargain of it, Psa. xiv. 6 : " Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge." But sincerity will make men despise that shame as David said, " And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight."

V. A SATISFACTION OF HEART IN IT : as though you should say, " I said it, and, Oh, but I am well pleased that ever I said it ; it was the best saying I could ever say. Ps. xvi. 2, 5, 6, 7. And this is in effect to say it over again. And good reason there is for them who have sincerely said it to be well satisfied in their refuge, and to rejoice in their portion. The reflecting upon it may afford solid delight and content of heart. Ye who have taken the Lord for your refuge may with much satisfaction reflect upon what you have done.—*Thomas Boston*.

Verse 6.—"Attend unto my cry."—

Can I see another's woe,
And not be in sorrow too ?
Can I see another's grief,
And not seek for kind relief ?

Can I see a falling tear,
And not feel my sorrow's share ?
Can a father see his child
Weep, nor be with sorrow filled ?

Can a mother sit and hear
An infant groan, an infant fear ?
No, no ; never can it be !
Never, never can it be !

And can he, who smiles on all,
Hear the wren, with sorrows small—
Hear the small bird's grief and care,
Hear the woes that infants bear,

And not sit beside the nest,
Pouring pity in its breast ?
And not sit the cradle near,
Weeping tear on infant's tear ?

And not sit both night and day
Wiping all our tears away ?
Oh, no ! never can it be !
Never, never can it be !

He doth give his joy to all ;
He becomes an infant small ;
He becomes a man of woe ;
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not by ;
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.

Oh ! he gives to us his joy,
That our grief he may destroy :
Till our grief is fled and gone,
He doth sit by us and moan.

William Blake (1757—1828), in "*Songs of Innocence*," 1789.

Verse 6.—"I am brought very low," etc. However true this may have been David lurking in a cave, while his enemy, Saul, was at the head of a powerful

army, it is more literally true of Christ, who could truly say, "*I am brought very low.*" because "he himself became obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." He was also "*brought very low,*" when he, that had the right of sitting on the cherubim, hung between two robbers. Truly also were his enemies "*stronger than he*" when "their hour came," and "power was given to darkness," so as to appear, for awhile, to eclipse the sun of justice itself.—*Robert Bellarmine.*

Verse 6.—"For they are stronger than I." But they are not stronger than THOU. Thou canst make us "stronger than our enemies": Ps. cv. 24. He who is stronger than the strong man armed (Luke xi. 22), Israel's oppressor, and whose very "weakness is stronger than men" (1 Cor. i. 25), shall "ransom" her "from him that was stronger than" she: Jer. xxxi. 11; Ps. xviii. 17.—*Andrew Robert Fausset.*

Verse 7.—"Bring my soul out of prison," etc. As if he should say, O Lord, I confess I am a poor prisoner to sin and Satan, I would fain be set at liberty to believe thy word, and to do thy will; but, alas, I cannot. I find many a door fast shut upon me in this prison, and many a lock upon the doors, many lets and impediments which I am never able to remove; and therefore, gracious Lord, do that for me, which neither I myself nor all the friends I can make are ever able to do for me; pay the debts of thy poor prisoner in my blessed Surety, and set open the prison doors: "*Bring my soul out of prison, O LORD, that I may praise thy name!*"—*Matthew Lawrence, in "The Use and Practice of Faith," 1657.*

Verse 7.—"The righteous shall compass me about." In a circle, like a crown, as the word signifies; when delivered they should flock to him and come about him to see him and look at him, as a miracle of mercy, whose deliverance was marvellous; and to congratulate him upon it, and to join with him in praise unto God for it. The Targum is, "For my sake the righteous will make to thee a crown of praise."—*John Gill.*

Verse 7.—"For thou shalt deal bountifully with me." Others' mercies ought to be the matter of our praises to God; and others' praises to God on our behalf ought to be both desired and rejoiced in by us.—*Matthew Henry.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Verse 1.—I. A vivid memory—of what he did, and how, and when. II. A public declaration; from which we infer that his prayer cheered him, brought him succour in trouble, and deliverance out of it. III. A reasonable inference: he prays again.

Verses 1, 2.—I. Special seasons for prayer: times of complaint and trouble. II. Special prayer on such occasions; "I cried," "I make my supplication." "I poured out my complaint," "I showed before him my trouble." Spread the whole case before God, as Hezekiah did the letter from Sennacherib.—*G. R.*

Verse 2.—I. The true place for prayer—"before him." II. The freedom of prayer—"poured out." III. The unveiling of the heart in prayer—"shewed before him my trouble."

Verse 3 (first clause).—I. When. II. Then.

Verse 3 (latter clause).—Temptations. I. What form they take?—"snares." II. Who lay them?—"they." III. How do they lay them? Secretly, craftily—"in the way," frequently. IV. What becomes of the tempted believer? He lives to tell the tale, to warn others to glorify God.

Verse 4 (last clause).—The soul considered of no value. I. Consider the worth of the soul. 1. The soul will continue for ever. 2. The righteous will grow more happy, and the wicked more miserable. 3. A great price has been paid for it. II. Contrast the care we take of our souls, and our anxiety about worldly objects. 1. The solicitude we manifest for riches. 2. Our care in educating the intellects of our children. 3. Eagerness in pursuit of business, honour—even trifles. 4. How anxious about a human life! Describe the search for a lost child. 5. Contrast our care for souls and our Saviour's care for them: Paul's, Luther's, Whitefield's. III. Remember some things which show that this care does not exist. 1. If you do

not stately observe secret prayer. 2. If your soul is not burdened with the souls of others. 3. If you neglect family prayer, or observe it as a mere form. 4. If you do not regularly go to prayer-meetings. Remark: The great responsibility resting upon every Christian.—*Jacob Knapp*, in "*The Homiletic Monthly*," 1882.

Verse 4 (last clause).—The burden of souls. I. What is meant by care for souls? 1. To have a firm conviction of their value 2. To cherish tender solicitude for their welfare. 3. To feel alarming apprehensions of their danger. 4. To make zealous exertions for their salvation. II. Who ought specially to exercise this care? 1. Parents. 2. Teachers. 3. Ministers. 4. Members. III. The criminality of neglect. 1. It is ungrateful. 2. It is cruel. 3. It is fatal.—*W. W. Wythe*, in "*The Pulpit Analyst*," 1870.

Verses 4, 5.—I. A terrible plight; no friend, no helper, no pitying heart. II. A touching prayer. A cry and a saying.

Verses 4, 5.—I. Human help fails most when most needed. 1. In outward troubles: "I looked," etc. 2. In soul troubles: "No man cared for my soul." II. Divine help is most given when most needed. A refuge and a portion when all others fail. Man has many friends in prosperity, one only in adversity.—*G. R.*

Verses 4, 5.—I. Why the saints make God their refuge, and the object of their faith and hope in their greatest afflictions. 1. God has given himself to the saints, in the covenant of grace, to be their God, and has promised that they shall be his people. 2. God stands in a most near relation to the saints, and condescends to sustain many endearing characters of love, which he fulfils to their advantage. 3. The saints, through the power of God's grace upon their souls, have chosen him for their portion, and their highest felicity. II. What perfections there are in God that render him a safe refuge for the saints, and a proper object of their confidence. 1. God is infinite in mercy. 2. God is infallible in wisdom. 3. God is boundless in power. 4. God is omniscient and omnipresent. 5. God is a Being whose love never changes. 6. God is an independent Being, and the Governor and Director of all things. III. The many sweet advantages, arising to the saints, from this practice of making God their refuge, in their greatest troubles. 1. They have been preserved from fainting under their heavy burdens. 2. They have derived from God new and seasonable supplies of divine grace and strength for service. 3. God has refreshed his saints with divine consolations for the future.—*John Farmer*, 1744.

Verse 5.—The soul choosing God. I. Deliberately: "I cried unto thee, I said." II. For all in all: "refuge," "portion." III. Before every other "in the land of the living."—*W. B. H.*

Verse 5.—"How we may bring our Hearts to bear Reproofs." See *John Owen's* Sermon in "*The Morning Exercises*," vol. ii. page 600, etc.; and in his "*Works*," vol. xvi. p. 23, etc.

Verse 6.—Two petitions and two arguments.

Verses 6, 7.—I. The language of Despondency. "I am brought very low." "My enemies are stronger than I." "My soul is in prison." II. Of Prayer. "Attend unto me." "Deliver me." "Bring me out of prison." III. Of Praise. 1. For the congratulation of others. 2. For his own deliverance and prosperity.—*G. R.*

Verse 6.—Low and Lowly. Here is David, I. In a low place; the depth of a cave. II. In a low way: "very low"; "stronger than I." III. But see,— "with the lowly is wisdom" (*Prov. xi. 2*); he prays. IV. The Lord "hath respect to the lowly," *Ps. cxxxviii. 6*. He will not pray in vain.—*W. B. H.*

Verse 7.—A prisoner. A freed-man. A singer. A centre. A wonder.

Verse 7.—Prison Dreams. I. What we image in our fetters. 1. Christ's brow girt about with rare praise. 2. Christ's people compassing and accompanying us in costliest service. 3. A new life of bounty and blessing when we get out. II. How far do our dreamings come true? Before peril and after; under conviction, and after conversion; sick room, and active service. III. The duty of fidelity to prison vows and lessons.—*W. B. H.*

Verse 7 (middle clause).—A Queen Bee. An under-shepherd. A warm hearth. A Museum of wonders. Or, they shall surround me, interested in my story—"out of prison"; drawn by my song—"praise thy name"; attracted by likeness of character, and admiring the goodness of the Lord."

Verse 7 (last clause).—Take this with *Ps. cxvi. 7*. "The Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Infer the future from the past.