

Psalm 41

Abuse and assurance
To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

Psalm 41: At the heart of this psalm is the sad reality of being forsaken by one's friend (verse 9). The experience of David could have occurred on several occasions, though the desertion of Ahithophel to Absalom's side comes to mind immediately (2 Sam. 15:12, 31). In any case, this experience became prophetic of the experience of another, the Lord Jesus, who was Himself forsaken by a close associate (John 13:18). The three key sections of the psalm naturally relate well to the believer who has been deceived by a friend: the principle that the Lord delivers the needy (verses 1-3), a statement of David's own hurtful experience (verses 4-9), and an expression of his certain confidence in God's vindication of him (verses 10-12). The final verse of the psalm is the characteristic doxology that ends each of the five books of the Psalms.

Verses 1-13: The words of this psalm are general and apply to anyone who might be considered "down". The most painful and specific factor addressed here is the insult which is being added to the psalmist's injury (compare Psalms 6, 38; and portions of Job and Jeremiah). While the form and structure of Psalm 41 are quite complex, "blessed" serves as bookends (in verses 1, 13).

Within these, other elements include:

- (1) Confidence (verses 1b-3, 11-12);
- (2) Prayers (verses 4, 10); and
- (3) Lament (verses 5-9), with moments of wisdom and praise.

David's message in Psalm 41 speaks of God's tender, loving care in the critical care unit of life.

- I. Recognizes Human Compassion (41:1a);
- II. Revels in God's Care for the Compassionate (41:1b-3);
- III. Requests Grace, Health, and Forgiveness (41:4);
- IV. Rehearses the Meanness that He Has Experienced (41:5-9);
- V. Requests Grace, Health, and Retribution (41:10);
- VI. Revels in God's Care for Him Personally 41:11-12);
- VII. Recognizes Divine Compassion (41:13).

Psalm 41:1 "Blessed [is] he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble."

"Blessed": Or, happy, as in (Psalm 41:2, and in Psalm 1:1). The word is to be distinguished from blessed in the doxology of (Psalm 41:13), the tribute of human reverence to divine majesty. The last Psalm in Book 1 (this psalm), begins like the first with a beatitude.

"That considereth the poor": Behaves considerately and intelligently towards those in affliction. Showing kindness and sympathy, and not judging them harshly. Compare for illustration (Psalm 35:13-14; James 1:27). The word rendered poor is different from that in (Psalm 40:17). It means weak, and includes the sick as well as the poor. "Blessed is" begins (1:1), and closes the first book of Psalms, forming bookends for this part of the collection (1-41).

"The Lord will deliver him": The poor afflicted man. Though his enemies conclude his case to be desperate (Psalm 41:8), God will prove them to be wrong and deliver him. Or, rather, the considerer of the poor, the person that visits and relieves him. And so, it is a promise of recompense. The wise and merciful man shall find mercy.

Jesus said, "In as much as ye have done it to the least of these, you have done it also unto me".

1 Peter 4:8 "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."

We can easily see from this Scripture (in 1 Peter), that God wants us to be charitable. He especially wants us to be charitable to those who are worse off financially than we are. The best example of this in all the Bible was Jesus. He healed the lame, gave sight to the blind, opened deaf ears, and fed the multitude. We know that even the leper who people avoided, was touched by Jesus and healed. One of the parables that Jesus told about helping those in need was the parable of the good Samaritan.

Luke 10:33 "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion [on him],"

To learn more about this read chapter 10 of Luke.

Psalm 41:2 "The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; [and] he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies."

"He shall be blessed upon the earth": The verb "be ... blessed" is from the same Hebrew root as the exclamatory description "blessed" (of verse 1; on other occurrences of the verb, compare Prov. 3:18; 31:28; Song of Solomon 6:9).

You cannot out give God. If you give to the poor, God will give back to you. If you pray for the sick, God will keep you healthy. If you give a place of rest to someone homeless, you shall always have a bed. Whatever you do for someone else, God will reward you for. You cannot give directly to God, but every time you help someone in need, you are helping God. Of course, saint and sinner alike have troubles from time to time, but God will help those who have generously helped others. The type of person who helps others is a follower of Jesus. This person already has eternal life in heaven to look forward to, but this says the Lord will keep him safe from his enemies here on the earth as well.

Proverbs 16:7 "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Psalm 41:3 "The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness."

“The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing”: This pictures God as Physician dispensing His tender, loving care. When on a sick bed, or a death bed, where he lies languishing, and ready to expire. When his natural strength, spirits, and heart fail him, then the Lord strengthens him with strength in his soul. And is the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. The Targum is, "the Word of the Lord shall help him in his life, and shall appear to him on the bed of his illness, to quicken him;"

"Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness": Or "all his bed thou hast turned" or "wilt turn in his sickness". Meaning not the recovery of him from a bed of sickness to a state of health, which is the sense given by many. Much less a turning him from a state of ease and rest into trouble and distress. But making him easy and comfortable on a bed of sickness. Which, in a literal sense, is done when a sick person's bed is turned or made, or he is turned upon it from side to side. So the Lord, by the comforts of his Spirit, makes a sick and death bed easy to them that believe in Christ. And often puts that triumphant song into their mouths in their dying moments.

Languishing in the verse above, means sickness. This then means that God will be with him, even when he is sick. He will be comforted even in sickness. What a blessing to know that God will be with us in the little trials that we have on this earth. Some sickness is not caused by sin in our life. Job felt the presence of God when he was very sick. God is our very present help in time of trouble. This caring by the Lord is even sweeter than a mother wiping your hot brow and bringing warm soup to you. It really means that we won't be sick very long.

Psalm 41:4 "I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee."

“For I have sinned against thee”: The ancient Near Eastern association of sin and sickness returns (compare Psalms 31:10; 32:5; 38:3-4, 18; 40:12). On the explicit combination of “sinning against”, compare Psalm 51:4. This perspective of the psalmist does not negate the reference to his basic “integrity” (in verse 12).

This verse is a total change from the previous verses. This is possibly speaking of David. David goes back to confessing the sin he has committed and asking for forgiveness. Do not give me justice, give me mercy is his cry.

Psalm 41:5 "Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish?"

They take occasion to speak evil of me in my weak and feeble state, thus adding to my sorrows. The word "evil" here refers to their calumnies or reproaches. They spoke of him as a bad man; as if it were desirable that he should die. That his influence in the world should come to an end, and that his name should be forgotten.

"When shall he die": "He is sick; sick on account of his sins. It seems certain that he will die; and it is desirable that such a man should die. But he seems to linger on, as if there were no hope of

his dying." Nothing can be imagined unkind, cutting, severe than this. The desire that a man who is sick shall die, and be out of the way. Nothing could add more to the sorrows of sickness itself than such a wish; than to have it talked about among men. Whispered from one to another, that such a man was a nuisance. That he was a bad man; that he was suffering on account of his sins. That it was desirable that his death should occur as soon as possible, and that all remembrance of him on earth should cease.

"His name perish? David evidently was, or had been, when his enemies thus spoke, on the bed of sickness, prostrate, and in danger of his life. While he thus suffered, they rejoiced, expecting his early demise. When he was dead, they intended that his name should "perish;" i.e. that his memory should be utterly rooted out.

David had set a standard on the side of the Lord in his day. Those classified as his enemies, were also enemies of the Lord. These enemies thought if he would just die and get out of their way, they could live any way they wanted to without a hurting conscience. Usually people who speak evil of others are trying to cover up some sin in their own life. They think if they can make someone else look bad, it will make them look better. They would like to get rid of him and his name die out. They were not aware that David would live on. God had promised that his descendants would reign. Of Course, this was really speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ who will reign as Lord of lords and King of kings. Jesus was in the lineage of David in the flesh.

Psalm 41:6 "And if he come to see [me], he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; [when] he goeth abroad, he telleth [it]."

"If he come ... he goeth abroad": This hypocritical "sick call" really adds insult to injury. The visitor lies to the sick one and gathers "information" for more slander.

This reminds me of the trouble that righteous Job had. His so called friends accused him of being a sinful man, because he had this disease in his body. In fact, they had talked so badly about Job, that Job had to pray for them before God would forgive them. Just as God punished the friends of Job for their iniquity, God will punish those bearers of bad news here. They are only pretending to be his friend.

Psalm 41:7 "All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt."

That is, they privately conspired against him (see Matt. 22:15).

"Against me do they devise my hurt": Not only to take away his name and credit, but his life.

Pretending to be his friends, they are really his enemies. They are two-faced also. They do not say these things to his face. They get out and whisper behind his back. They really want to destroy him.

Psalm 41:8 "An evil disease, [say they], cleaveth fast unto him: and [now] that he lieth he shall rise up no more."

An evil disease (literally, a thing of Belial), say they, cleaveth fast unto him. On the meaning of "Belial" (see the comment on Psalm 18:4.) The "thing of Belial" here intended may, perhaps, be the disease from which David was suffering. But is more probably some disgraceful charge or infamous slander which had been circulated concerning him, and was now crushing him down. This character assassination is represented as poured out upon him like a coating of molten metal (see Job 41:23-24), and so cleaving to him.

"Cleaveth fast unto him": Or rather, "is poured upon him." The word used here means:

- (1) To be narrow, straitened, compressed; and then
- (2) To pour out - as metal is poured out Job 28:2, or as words are poured out in prayer (Isa. 26:16).

"And now that he lieth": I.e. "now that he is prostrate upon a sick-bed."

"He shall rise up no more": He shall not recover, but die of his malady.

It is very easy to declare an illness that someone else has as evil. The person can even figure out how this illness is a punishment from God, like Job's friends confessed. So many ministers today are proclaiming that all illness is because of sin. That just is not true. The disciples asked Jesus, who had sinned the blind man, or his parents? Jesus answered them and said: neither one. We must be careful about proclaiming someone else's illness as a judgement of God. If we judge our brother, the illness could come to us. We are not to judge others at all.

Luke 6:37 "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:"

Psalm 41:9 "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up [his] heel against me."

"Mine own familiar friend ... lifted up his heel against me": David's close companion betrayed him; he kicked him while he was "down". The Greater David's experience and the employment of this reference (in John 13:18), was to Judas (compare Matt. 26:21).

It is bad enough for our enemies to speak out against us, but when a close friend turns against you, it is almost unbearable. Judas Iscariot called Jesus friend, and yet he betrayed Him. Many of us, who are trying to get something done for God, have felt this very same hurt. Many times, it is your closest friend who you thought had been in total agreement with you. I have even felt this hurt from family as well. There is no way to ignore this type of hurt. The only consolation that we do have is, we have not suffered to the extent that the Lord Jesus did.

Psalm 41:10 "But thou, O LORD, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them."

They censure me grievously, and conclude my case to be desperate. But, Lord, do thou vindicate me, and confute them.

"Raise me up, that I may requite them": And I will requite them, that is, punish them for their malicious, perfidious, and wicked practices. Which, being now a magistrate, it was his duty to do, for the public good. For he was not to bear the sword in vain, but, being a minister of God, invested with his authority, was to be a revenger, to execute wrath upon those that did evil (Rom. 13:4).

David is asking God to heal him, but more than that, to show these people that the Lord had not abandoned him. This very thing happened to Job. Job was restored of all that he had lost. In fact, God gave him twice as much as he had before. Can you even imagine how those who opposed Jesus felt on resurrection morning?

Psalm 41:11 "By this I know that thou favorest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me."

Or, delightest in me (compare Psalm 18:19; 22:8; 2 Sam. 15:26). Because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. David's enemies had not triumphed over him, and he felt assured that they would not be allowed to triumph.

"Because mine enemy doth not triumph over me": David's enemies had not triumphed over him, and he felt assured that they would not be allowed to triumph. This assurance was so strong that he could make it an argument on which to ground his belief that God "delighted in him." David argues from effect to cause.

David knows that God is with him, because his enemies did not overwhelm him. Sometimes it takes a while for us to be victorious over our enemies, but if we do not doubt God, we shall be victorious.

Psalm 41:12 "And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever."

Literally, "and I;" as if there were some verb understood. The reference is turned on himself; on all that was suggested by this train of remark as bearing on himself. The result of the whole was a firm assurance that God would sustain him, and that he would be established before God forever.

"Thou upholdest me": Not merely in strengthening me in my sickness, but, what is more important, in vindicating my character against the aspersions which are cast upon it. Thou dost show that I am upright.

"In mine integrity": Literally, "in my perfection" (see the notes at Job 1:1). The word here means uprightness, sincerity, honesty. His foes have been making false statements about him. His sickness had been regarded by them as a proof that he was a hypocrite or a stranger to God. If he had died, they would have urged that fact as evidence that he was the object of the divine displeasure. His restored health was clear proof that their suggestions were false, and that he was not suffering for the cause which they alleged. God thus showed that he regarded him as upright and sincere. The claim is not that of "absolute perfections," but only of a character of piety or

integrity in opposition to the slanderous charges of his enemies (compare Psalms 7:8; 25:21; 26:1, 26:11).

"And settest me before thy face for ever": His enemies hope that his name will perish. He knows that he will be admitted to stand in the presence of the King of Kings (compare note on Psalm 11:7; 16:11; 17:15; 61:7; and the fundamental promise in 2 Sam. 7:16).

David is saying here, that the Lord not only saved him, but saved his good name as well. This is like the Christian who is saved: they are not only saved from further sin in this life, but for all of eternity as well. David knows that God has forgiven him and that this is forever.

Psalm 41:13 "Blessed [be] the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen."

"Blessed be": The essence of the Hebrew root of "amen" is "it is true", i.e., reliable, confirmed, verified. Note that Book 1 of Psalms (Psalms 1-41), closes with a doxology; compare the endings of the other 4 books (Psalms 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48; 150:6).

This is a thankful David who speaks blessings to the Lord. The Lord is already blessed, but He likes to hear us speak blessings toward Him anyhow. This is our way of saying; Lord I love you. It is also recognizing the eternity of God. Amen means so be it. Amen.

Psalm 41 Questions

1. Blessed is he that considereth the _____.
2. What is a very popular parable that Jesus told of helping those in need?
3. What will happen to you, if you give to the poor?
4. What does languishing mean?
5. Who was an example of someone sick, who was righteous in God's sight?
6. David was really saying, do not give me justice, give me _____.
7. In verse 5, who was speaking evil of him?
8. What were they wanting to happen to David?
9. Whose enemies were these evil ones?
10. Who was David's name carried on by?
11. What happened to Job's friends who talked so badly about him?

12. Pretending to be his friend, they were really his _____.
13. In verse 8, they called his disease what?
14. What does Luke 6:37 say about judging?
15. Who had lifted his heel against him in verse 9?
16. Who called Jesus friend, and yet betrayed HIM?
17. When a close friend, or a family member, come against us for what we are doing for God, what can we take consolation in?
18. What is David really asking for in verse 10?
19. How does David know that God favors him?
20. What, besides his person, had God saved for David?
21. Who does David call the Lord in verse 13?