

**“Our Present and Future Hope” – Psalm 142**  
**July 5, 2020 – Indoor/Livestream 6pm Evening Service**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA**  
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**Psalm 142**

A MASKIL OF DAVID, WHEN HE WAS IN THE CAVE. A PRAYER.

Psa. 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.

Psa. 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.

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.

Psa. 142:5 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 Lord.

*Thanks be to God.*

**Let’s pray.**

In 2005, as a recent graduate from college, I asked if I could tag along to a presbytery meeting. After all, I knew that one day I would need to know what presbytery was all about and that I would, Lord willing, be a part of one as a pastor one day.

I remember that day, watching as a young candidate stood up and was examined by all the pastors. One particularly well-known pastor began to quiz this candidate on the Psalms. He said, “I am going to quote a few Psalms for you, and I want you to tell me which Psalm it is.” One by one, this pastor quoted Psalms from memory. And we all stared wide-eyed as this young candidate would say, “Um, er, um. Psalm 5? Or Psalm 32?” One by one, he got them all wrong. It was painful. I was nauseated for that poor guy. Then the pastor said, “Well, why don’t you recite one or two Psalms you know?” Silence. Eternal silence. You could hear a pin drop.

That Pastor, who was our very own Rob Rayburn, let the candidate off the hook, but not before he turned to the candidate and said something like this, “Your ministry will either live or die by the Psalms.”

The truth is, the Psalms are incredibly important for our faith, for they show us the mind and heart of God and man. R.C. Sproul is reported to have said,

“In the psalms, we have a collection of 150 prayers that were inspired originally by the Holy Ghost. If you want to know how God is pleased and honored in prayer, why not immerse yourself in the prayers that he himself has inspired?”

And with that in mind, let’s turn to Psalm 142, with hearts prepared to learn from David’s prayer.

### **God is sovereign in all circumstances**

Now, our Psalm begins with a title that says, “A Maskil of David, when he was in the Cave. A prayer.” In this small piece of information, we are given the opportunity to know the context within which this Psalm was written. David is praying, and he is in a cave.

As we know, there are other passages in Scripture that can give us further information about David and his history, and why he might have been in the cave to begin with.

Sure enough, in 1 Samuel 16-22 we read of the events that took place to bring David into this cave. For time’s sake, I will summarize what occurs in these chapters.

The first king of Israel, Saul, has been evil in the eyes of the Lord. He has disobeyed the Lord’s direct commands, and therefore God is going to remove him from the throne. This will not be an immediate removal, as we will see, but God has determined it, and it will come to pass.

In ch. 16, Samuel the prophet anoints David as Saul’s successor to be king. In the next chapter we read of God’s hand coming upon David, and though a young man, the Lord delivered into his hand Israel’s greatest enemy – the giant Goliath.

In chapters 18-22, we see Saul's sin getting a firmer and greater grip upon him, taking him over. His jealousy of David builds as the people sing praises to David. And Saul manifests his anger in his desire to kill David.

And so, we come to our passage today in which David has been warned that Saul had ordered his death. David is in great danger and despair, and is running for his life.

Perhaps you can imagine how David is feeling in this Psalm. If you have ever been in an extremely stressful situation such as being robbed, getting in an intense fight with someone, or even having an intense altercation with someone, you have an idea of how David felt. All these things cause great emotional stress and anxiety. Many times after stressful events such as these, your mouth dries up and your body shakes for minutes afterwards.

And here, David isn't facing some small altercation, he is being pursued by Saul and his entire kingdom! They are not just trying to beat him up, they are trying to kill him! With great anguish and despair David writes this Psalm.

***David's knowledge of covenant Lord's history with his people.***

But it is interesting that David does not simply put his head between his hands, despair and curse. He doesn't just get angry or cry. Instead, he turns to God.

But I would argue that the reason that David turns to God is because of what God means to him, not because he was simply a religious person. David has a robust understanding of God. He knows who God is through what he has done in history.

In 2020, we assume we know who God is. I don't know how many times I have heard people say, "If God really exists, he would not allow X". Or, "How could God do this to me?" Or, "How could God allow for such a thing to occur?" Today, we think we know what God ought to be like. We think we know what God ought to be doing in our lives.

But David has a very different perspective. David knows God, not by his imagination of what God should be like according to David, but who God is according to Scripture. According to Scripture, he knows God is a covenant God. He is a God who has been faithful to his people, and who has sovereignly worked out all things for His glory and their salvation.

We see evidence for this in that in verse 1 David calls out to Yahweh (YHWH), (Jehovah). Here he refers to the covenant Lord, not just a common word for 'Lord', but the God of the covenant. In other words, he is praying specifically with the name of the Lord who has made a direct promise of redemption and salvation to Israel his people.

David turns to YHWH, because he knows that He is with him, and that all things are in his hands. He knows his history, and surely he has been taught of God's covenant faithfulness with Adam and Eve, where He promised that through their descendants there would be a savior, and that throughout history, God would sovereignly save his people.

David had heard of God's faithfulness to Israel even when they were being killed and beaten and oppressed by their oppressors in Egypt. He has seen how God has sovereignly protected his own throughout history.

Ingrained in his heart is the fact that God has been faithful to his people even in the most dire of circumstances. Even against the great forces of Egypt, God sovereignly and powerfully guided his people out of Egypt on dry ground.

Certainly in David's own life, he has seen God's sovereign protection over him as he fought with a lion and then with a bear. God also handed the powerful Goliath into his hands, and ultimately God anointed David as king through the prophet Samuel.

David is aware that there is a plan in the works. Even in the background of these terrible, stressful and despairing events, David knows that God is sovereign over all. This is why he believes, in verse 3, that God knows his way. He says, "You know my way!" God has a plan for him. This is why he refers to God as the covenant Lord. This is why he cries out to the Lord who he knows is able to sovereignly intervene in his life.

Oh that we would understand God in this way! That we would reflect upon God's actions in the history of the Scriptures and in our own lives and know that he is truly sovereign, and that he redeems his own from even the most terrible circumstances!

Oh that we would turn away from anger, and from bitterness toward God, and instead cry out to him for help! That instead of turning inward, we would turn upward to God in confidence!

The Scriptures are clear in teaching that God is in control of all things. God has ordained all that comes to pass. And as a sovereign God, he works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purpose. Therefore, just as David did, let us put our trust in the all powerful, never-changing God who works everything in our lives for our good and for his glory.

### ***God hears our prayers***

In Acts 27, we read of a very interesting account, one that I love to reference. The Apostle Paul is prisoner on a ship, and they are about to be shipwrecked – but God has revealed to Paul that all men on his ship would be saved from their seemingly eminent doom. Yet equally certain, according to the passage, was the fact that in order for all these men to be saved, the sailors were still needed. God's sovereign plan was clear, but Paul's actions were still incredibly crucial.

David's response to similar trouble in his life was one of prayer. It was not a typical prayer that we would hear in everyday church settings, or at a prayer meeting. This is the type of prayer of a man who has a unique and deep relationship with the Lord.

What is particularly interesting about this prayer is what David brings up in his prayer. In vv 2-3, we see that David calls up to the Lord with *cries*, and he pleads for mercy. He *pours out* his complaints before the Lord, *telling his troubles*.

Yet, throughout the Psalm it is assumed, without a doubt, that God has a sovereign plan. How can a man who knows that God “knows his way” tell God all his troubles, and pour out his concerns and complaints to the Lord?

How does this compute? How do these two concepts mesh? We have a clear depiction of the fact that God is *sovereign*, but also a clear portrayal of David’s expecting his *prayers to be effective*.

David doesn’t see these two ideas in conflict. David saw these two things as *compatible*, so much so that he brings each of them together in this prayer.

As we’ve already stated, God’s Word clearly shows that His plan will absolutely come to pass. However, we can easily misinterpret this doctrine of providence and sovereignty negatively. And we do.

We incorrectly interpret God’s sovereignty to mean that our prayers cannot change something that is already set or fixed in place. The reasoning seems to argue something along the lines that since God is sovereign then his plan will always come to pass, our prayers are therefore useless.

But the doctrine or teaching of sovereignty is not meant as a guide on *how not to pray*. Rather, God’s sovereignty and providence over all things is a teaching in scripture that helps us *to pray*. And to pray confidently.

And in this Psalm and in Jesus’ prayer we see a perfect depiction of sovereignty and prayer interacting at the same time:

Jesus, the very son of God, knowing fully well that His Father knows all things, is found praying repeatedly in the Scriptures. Early in the morning, late at night, praying, praying, praying. We certainly cannot ignore the fact that Jesus, God the Son, is praying. And not only is he praying, but he is doing so with a full knowledge of God’s sovereignty.

Furthermore, Jesus does not pray simply because it was tradition, or as part of a ritual, or merely to be a good example. Jesus views prayer as a crucial part of life and understands prayer to be effective and powerful. And his prayers are strengthened by his knowledge of who God really is.

One pastor writes that often times people pray like orphans. He says, “The tragedy of a child without a father is that he or she can never depend on a father’s love,” and thus the orphan’s prayer is much like a pagan’s prayer.<sup>1</sup> It is a prayer that is filled with unbelief. And rightly so. The orphan has no reason to expect that a father will hear his prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip G. Ryken, *When You Pray*, 27.

But those who trust in God as their heavenly father have every right to come before him, in the name of Jesus. This is precisely why it is so crucial that we pray as this Psalm teaches us. We must pray with confidence in God's faithfulness and love toward us, and we will only have this confidence and assurance in God if we realize how faithful he has been throughout history with us, and if we realize that he is sovereignly caring and watching over us.

Keeping this in mind will make our prayers more simple and frequent as well. We should not feel the need to hire a lawyer or draft a formal petition to be able to come before God; we can simply ask him as a child asks his father. We do not need to pray long religious prayers, or pray in ways that seek to impress others or to impress God. These are prayers that the pagans are accused of offering. Rather, as Eccl. 5 teaches, we are to keep our prayers short and sweet when we are in God's presence.

In the same way that we have been influenced by our culture to believe that God should be different than who he is, we have also begun to view prayer as something that it is not. We tend to measure our spirituality by the amount of time and way a person prays.

Prayer need not consist of lengthy explanations. If you find that your prayer life is weak, is it possible that you are trying to make things too complicated? Phillip Ryken says, that our prayers must be fervent, of course, and they ought to be frequent, but they do not need to be fancy.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time let us not forget the fact that they must be fervent and frequent. James 5 teaches us that we ought to come before God in prayer when we are in need and when we are content. Paul tells us to pray continually, and David shows us how he prayed both continually and fervently. As he ran for his life, he took time to pray this prayer to God, and poured out his soul before him.

Therefore this Psalm clearly indicates to us that God hears our prayers. He is not a false God to whom you must beg and scream out. He is a Father who loves his children, and hears their prayers and acts upon them.

Brothers and sisters, do you pray? Do you wake up early to come before the Lord? Do you spend evenings in prayer as well? Do you believe that God not only hears you, but can sovereignly and effectively grant your request? Jesus teaches us to pray to the Father, making godly requests in his name....and Jesus teaches us that he will not only hear us, but that he will answer us.

### ***God brings hope.***

Surely many of us are thinking, "Yes, all that is true, and the Bible does teach that, but I cannot tell you how many times I have prayed and I have not seen God answer my prayers. In fact, it is really seems like a waste of time." Though we may never have said these precise words, most all of us have thought something along these lines.

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<sup>2</sup> Ryken, *When you Pray*, 31.

Back in California, when we were fostering a little girl named Emily, she tripped and fell, leaving a pretty deep gash under her chin. She handled it better than any 3-year-old girl that I know, *until* the doctor started to work on closing up the wound.

If Emily had been praying during those moments of great pain, and her prayers at all reflected her blood-curdling screams, I can assure you that she would be asking for immediate pain relief.

But what would've happened if she got what she wanted? If she had received immediate pain relief, the doctor's work on her chin would have been incomplete, leaving a wound open to infection and even further and greater future pain.

It is very easy to be swayed by temptation and to become frustrated with what we perceive to be God's "slow" response to our prayers. We spend a few minutes in prayer to God, and if we do not see an immediately answered prayer minutes after we open our eyes, we get frustrated.

But brothers and sisters, do we really know what is best? Do we know how God is responding to our prayers? Are we impatient with Him? Do we become resentful if God does not give us what we want when we want it?

If we follow David's life from the time that he wrote this Psalm until the time that he was completely free from Saul's pursuit of him, we see that many years pass by. David's prayer is not completely answered until the end of the book of 1 Samuel! It is at the end of 1 Samuel that God finally gives David the kingdom and brings about the death of Saul.

Surely David desired to be free from Saul's tyranny immediately. But he was not delivered until later on in life. And though God does not give him the immediate answer he was looking for, we see that he does give David something even more worthwhile. We see this because all of a sudden in the midst of the prayer, David's hope begins to grow.

The turning point in this Psalm is verse 5. Look with me again at our text. In verses 1-4 David is completely distraught. He has lost all hope. V. 1, he needs mercy. V. 2, he is complaining to God of his troubles. In v.3, his spirit is faint and his enemies are trying to get him – laying traps everywhere. In v. 4, it seems that everyone has left him. It is as if he says, "I look for my right hand man, and not even one person is there. No one even notices me. I have no refuge, I am in this dark cave, and no one cares for my soul."

But then in verse 5, in the midst of his despair, God intervenes and begins to answer him, showing him that He is his refuge. It is as if He were to say "David, I am your refuge. I am your portion in the land of the living." And then He continues with the words in v. 6 -7: "I can and will deliver you and bring you out of this prison and bondage. I will surround you with the righteous, and I will deal bountifully with you."

Within only a few verses, we see that God has lifted David's perspective heavenward. In the darkness and solitude of David's situation, God shines forth. The LORD demonstrates to David what is most important. This life is passing. We are pilgrims in temporary land. While the world has no hope, David, and we as Christians, can turn to God.

He will not only hear our prayers and answer them, but he will show us that he himself is the answer to our prayers. God himself is sufficient in and of himself to bring us all joy and peace and love that we will ever need.

Being a child has tremendous benefits doesn't it? You are cared for by your parents in such a way that you have extremely little to worry about. But when we become adults, we became distracted with the cares of this world. We began to adopt the concerns of this world.

But stop for a moment. Consider what it is that you want so badly. What is your heart longing for? What are you striving for so hard in this life that when God does not give it to you, you resent it?

The fact is, when we seek to put our own desires and purposes first, we put ourselves before God's kingdom. Matthew 6:33 tells us to seek first the kingdom of God. Not your kingdom.

Now David was praying for his *life*, not some new Ferrari, right? But you see that is just it. Though it is not incorrect, or illegitimate to pray for life, or to pray for safety or to pray for our needs, we must remember what is more important than all of that.

David's fear of death and loneliness was replaced with hope when he put God's kingdom first. When he realized that God is his life, his portion, his refuge and everything that he could ever want or need, then he found hope. Even if he were killed by Saul, he would still have salvation!

And who gives this promise? It is Jesus. Jesus promises that if we put first the kingdom of God then everything else will fall into place. He gives us this hope! But does Jesus offer this promise to all the world? Will all the world be heard by God the Father as David was? Can everyone have hope like David did?

The answer is yes, and the answer is no. Not everyone will have this hope. Not everyone will trust in Jesus. But to those who do believe in Jesus' name, God gives the right to become children of God.

The hope that David held onto was a hope that one day his savior would come and deliver him from the oppression of this world. And today we know and we testify that that Jesus is the savior of the world. And he has offered himself freely to all who would believe and trust upon his name.

When we are faced with all sorts of challenges and difficulties these days – when things keep falling through and your frustration grows, or when you lose loved ones or suffer because of your health or your situation – I pray that you would turn to Jesus.

In the most difficult circumstances, when everything else disappears, when we find ourselves alone and afraid and with nothing to our name but a cave like David's, we can still trust in Jesus. For He is the savior, he is our portion, and our treasure both now in this world, and forevermore. Amen.



