



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 25

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Introduction

- The author is David according to the title *A Psalm of David*
- It is the first of nine Alphabetic Psalms
- Acrostic or Alphabetic Psalms are those in which each verse, or each clause, begins sequentially with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet
- However, Psalm 25 is not completely alphabetic Psalm, there are a few irregularities in the acrostic pattern
- The acrostic pattern may be a device used to encourage learning and memorization
- The psalmist begins and ends with prayer



Introduction

- It is a wonderful display of the heart of a believer in a time of crisis
- It is evidently a composition of David's later days, for he mentions the sins of his youth
- It is full of mournful appeals to God for help and reflects that tendency to trust entirely to the Divine mercy
- It is easy to apply the several passages of this psalm to ourselves
- Because we have often conflicts and always sins, of which we complain at the throne of grace
- It is the mark of a true believer that his sorrows remind him of his sins, and his sorrow for sin drives him to God



Introduction

- According to St. Augustine, *“Christ speaks, but in the person of the Church: for what is said has reference rather to the Christian People turned unto God.”*
- And St. Jerome, *“The 25th Psalm contains the prayer of the Mediator offered to the Father: it may also be the clamor of the Church making her requests to God.”*



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- David Casts his Trust Upon God 25:1-2
- A Plea to God Who Helps 25:3-5
- A Plea for God to Remember and to Not Remember 25:6-7
- Declaring the Goodness of God 25:8-14
- Eyes Toward the God of Help 25:15-21
- A closing Request 25:22

David Casts his Trust Upon God

25:1-2



- In the first verse David direct his prayers to God with hope of a gracious answer
- He defines prayer as lifting his soul, together with his hands, up to the Lord
- For he who lifts up his hands and eyes, and not his heart, will hear the rebuke by the Lord to the children of Israel: *“These people draw near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me”* (Isaiah 29: 13)
- As Father John of Damascus says, “A prayer is lifting the heart to God.”

David Casts his Trust Upon God

25:1-2



- *O my God, I trust in You*, This is the first thought - a feeling that he had true confidence in God and his dependence was on God alone
- He expresses his faith and confidence in Him, in the midst of all his troubles
- When he asks *Let me not be ashamed*, he offers up a prayer which is taken from the ordinary doctrine of Scripture, namely, that they who trust in God shall never be ashamed
- He pleads to God to have mercy upon him so his enemies might not have the opportunity to rejoice at his defeat

A Plea to God Who Helps 25:3-5



- The prayer generalized as to all who wait on God
- It passes from the particular to the general; what David desires for himself he desires also for all the true servants of God - all who wait on Him, look to Him, seek a sign of His will
- He wanted all of them to be vindicated publicly and unashamed
- *ashamed* is not mainly embarrassment (though sometimes it is used that way)
- The idea is that of being disappointed or let down as we read in Romans 5:5, “*Now hope does not disappoint*” and in Isaiah 49:23, “*Then you will know that I Am the Lord, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me*”

A Plea to God Who Helps 25:3-5



- Let shame be the portion, not of Your servants, but of Your adversaries - of those who transgress (or rebel) without any just reason
- Sinners have no acceptable reason for going astray and sinning; they benefit no one, not even themselves by their sins
- Such persons deserve to be brought to shame
- *who deal treacherously without cause*, St. Augustine understands it of those who so vainly toil to acquire those earthly riches which make themselves wings and fly away

A Plea to God Who Helps 25:3-5



- Verse 4 reflects David's earnest desire to do God's will
- Man is so imperfect in spiritual understanding, so morally blind and ignorant, that, unless enlightened from on high, he cannot discern correctly the "way of godliness;" he does not know at any given moment what God would have him to do
- There is a difference between *ways* and *paths*
- *ways* are God's laws, that are general to all men
- *paths*, which are straighter and narrower than ways, those intense directions, such as poverty, chastity, and obedience, of which it is written, "*All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given.*" (Matthew 19:11)

A Plea to God Who Helps 25:3-5



- There is also a difference between *show* and to *teach*
- As, if once shown, the ways were comparatively easy, but the paths must be taught with difficulty and perseverance
- As if he is saying, “Show me the way to take and then teach me how to walk on it”
- St. Augustine comments, ““Make Thy ways, O Lord, known to me, and teach me Thy paths”, not those which are broad, and lead the many to destruction; but Thy paths, narrow, and known to few, teach Thou me.”

A Plea to God Who Helps 25:3-5



- He also said, “*Show me*, because I cannot show myself: *teach me*, for without Thee I can never learn. *Thy ways*: and mainly Him Who said, ‘I am the Way;’ and Whom Solomon calls the Beginning of God’s ways. *Show me Thy ways*; according as it is written, ‘The Lord directs the steps;’ and *teach me Thy paths*, according to that saying, ‘Master, we know that Thou art true, and teaches the way of God in truth’”
- Faith comes first then understanding
- We first believe and have faith then God guides us to understand

A Plea to God Who Helps 25:3-5



- St. Clement of Alexandria says, “Someone may say that the Greek have discovered philosophy through their human understanding; but as the Holy Book says that understanding is from God; the psalmist cries out: ‘I am Your servant, Give me understanding’ (Psalm 119:125)”
- *For You are the God of my salvation*, Who has saved me formerly and from whom alone I expect salvation
- *On You I wait all the day*, Continually, always
- He was really dependent upon Him at all times, and he felt that dependence

A Plea for God to Remember and to Not Remember 25:6-7



- Past mercies are good foundation for the expectation of future blessings
- God's character cannot change; His action as one time will always be consistent with His action at another
- David asks God to *remember*, “O consider Your own merciful nature, and Your former many and multiple acts of kindness toward me, and to other miserable sinners”
- The Lord is rich and abundant in mercy, plentiful in goodness
- His love is exceedingly great, and many and abundant are the ways and methods in which it is declared

A Plea for God to Remember and to Not Remember 25:6-7



- It has been well said that this very verse, in its method of addressing God, is another proof of His mercy
- That He allows Himself to be asked to call to remembrance; as if He, the omniscient, ever could forget
- Immediately after asking God to remember in verse 6, David then asked God to forget
- He wanted God to forget his own youthful sins (in the sense of forgiving them), and he wanted God to remember God's own faithfulness in prior times

A Plea for God to Remember and to Not Remember 25:6-7



- *According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O LORD,* These are strong expressions of David's humility and repentance
- He asked to be remembered not on the basis of merit, but on the basis of *mercy*
- He wanted God to do all this remembering and forgetting for the sake of God's own *goodness*, not David's supposed goodness
- This Psalm is the pattern of all prayer
- He calls on the mercy of God to have sympathy for him
- He exposes his own infirmity that it may be helped

A Plea for God to Remember and to Not Remember 25:6-7



- St. Augustine comments on verse 7 by saying, “The offences of my presumptuous boldness and of my ignorance reserve not for vengeance, but let them be as if forgotten by Thee. ‘According to Thy mercy, be mindful of me, O God.’ Be mindful indeed of me, not according to the anger of which I am worthy, but according to Thy mercy which is worthy of Thee. ‘For Thy goodness, O Lord.’ Not for my deserving, but for Thy goodness, O Lord.”

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- David turns from prayer to reflection and meditates on the character and ways of God
- God is, indeed, *good*, as he has implied in the preceding verse, kind, tender, gentle, merciful; but He is also *upright*
- He is just, straight, and unwavering
- St. Augustine comments on God's goodness and justice and say, "The Lord is gracious, since even sinners and the ungodly He so pitied, as to forgive all that is past; but the Lord is upright too, who after the mercy of vocation and pardon, which is of grace without merit, will require merits meet for the last judgment."

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- He will not abandon sinners - this is His goodness, but will redeem them, chasten them, make them to walk in His way - this is His uprightness
- God is *good and upright*, and this goodness can be for the benefit of sinners rather than for their destruction
- However, not every sinner receives these good things from God, but those who will humble themselves before Him do
- *The humble* knows his need of guidance, and is willing to submit his own understandings to the divine will, and therefore the Lord humble Himself to be his guide

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- In all His dealings God proves His loving purpose and His faithfulness to His promises to those who on their part are faithful to Him, keeping the covenant
- The conditions are that one stay in God's covenant and in His word, both in the sense of knowing them and obeying them
- The promise is that God will continually reveal His *mercy and truth* in all that we live and experience
- Mercy and truth will meet together in the case of those who, however they may have sinned, meekly submit themselves to God's guidance

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- Once again we see a strong expression of David's humility
- He expected *pardon* for God's sake, not his own
- He humbly recognized the greatness of his own *iniquity*
- The way of repentance is narrow, yet secure, for by it we return to God our Father, and enjoy His loving kindness
- David would not be able to confess his sins and transgressions unless the Lord reveals to him His everlasting mercies and loving kindness
- God' love and His fatherly compassion, are our support in confessing our sins

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- David set the idea of *humility* next to the idea of a reverent fear of God
- The two concepts are closely connected, and this humble, reverent person can expect the gift of God's guidance and instruction
- By the spirit of meekness, we enjoy the mercies of God, and experience His forgiving and compassionate fatherhood
- And by the fear of God our will conform to His divine will; and the way we choose would be His way
- If we choose wisely, God will give us grace to walk wisely

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- David described the earthly, material blessings that often come to the humble and reverent
- God's gracious attitude toward those who fear Him is love and compassion, *“For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.”* (Psalm 103:11)
- And also, mercy, *“And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.”* (Luke 1:50)
- And will be accepted by God, *“But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.”* (Acts 10:35)

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- Those who fear God, have nothing else to fear
- The soul that is sanctified by the grace of God, that is comforted by the peace of God, dwells *in prosperity* and be content
- Even when the body is sick and lies in pain, yet the soul may dwell *in prosperity* in God
- Some scholars explain *dwelling in prosperity* of the possession of heaven itself
- *And his descendants shall inherit the earth*, God remembers Isaac for the sake of Abraham, and Jacob for the sake of Isaac

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- However, some scholars speak of *the earth* to mean the body of him of whom the Psalmist speaks; and the sense to be his new nature, shall keep that body under subjection, and rule over it with an absolute power
- Others, see in *the earth* a figurative expression for our Lord's Body, which the righteous possess in the Blessed Sacrament here
- And if we apply the whole text to our Lord, His blessed soul, now no more "troubled," now no more "exceeding sorrowful," dwells in everlasting ease in the kingdom which He has won for Him; and His seed—for "now are *we* the sons of God,"—shall one day possess the earth, the new earth

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- After touching on the material blessings that may come to the humble and reverent man, David then spoke of the greatest blessing that one may receive – *the secret of the LORD*, and a greater understanding of *His covenant*
- Mysterious spiritual blessings await them too, as we read in Matthew 13:11, “*He answered and said to them, ‘because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,’*”
- St. Gregory says, “In the way of God, we begin in fear, and we end in fortitude.”

Declaring the Goodness of God

25:8-14



- His *secret*, His word and counsel, “*His secret counsel is with the upright.*” Proverbs 3:32
- His *secret*, may also mean the mystery of the Sacrament of the Altar, the Eucharist
- *His covenant*, God will teach them the true knowledge of His Word and the many and deep mysteries in it, and because it is said to be hid from many of them to whom it was revealed, Matthew 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:13-15

Eyes Toward the God of Help

25:15-21



- David is always looking to God, waiting for Him, expecting and anticipating His deliverances
- He is now, apparently, in some danger or difficulty, and in need of the Divine help
- St. John Chrysostom comments, “Birds, while they cleave the air at a height, are not easily taken. Thus thou, if thou will only fix your eyes on the things that are above, will not easily be taken with any snares. Birds have wings given to them to this end,— that they may avoid snares: men have reason,”
- He who keeps his eyes constantly directed towards God is continually in a praying mood, which cannot remain unanswered

Eyes Toward the God of Help

25:15-21



- Through the power of prayer, one may avoid the temptations of the devil
- St. Augustine says, “Nor would I fear the dangers of earth, while I look not upon the earth: for He upon whom I look, will pluck my feet out of the snare.”
- *Out of the net*, All kinds of temptations which Satan spreads in this world
- We see David did not hesitate to repeat his request to God
- He spoke in verse 15, of how he had turned his attention toward the Lord; here he asked God to *turn* His attention toward His needy servant

Eyes Toward the God of Help

25:15-21



- Perhaps David thought that He was not attentive to him; and he prays that He would turn and behold him; that He would see him in his trouble
- The psalmist seems to have felt that if God would look upon him, He would have mercy on him
- He knows if God turns to him, His love will compel Him to have mercy on him
- *Desolate*, The only one
- Not that he was quite alone, and had none with him, but wholly depended on the Lord, as if he had no one with him

Eyes Toward the God of Help

25:15-21



- He put no trust in men, nor in riches
- He was lonely and bowed down
- Jesus, while on earth, was in just such a condition
- None could enter into the secret depths of His sorrows, *“I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me.”* Isaiah 63:3

Eyes Toward the God of Help

25:15-21



- *Have enlarged*, Have become great
- The affliction, of whatever kind it may have been, was regarded by David as a punishment sent on him for his sins
- He was deeply conscious and deeply repentant of his sins
- *Look on my affliction and my pain*, This is a repetition of earnest pleading, as if God still turned away from him
- *forgive all my sins*, Is the cry of a soul that is more ill of sin than of pain
- When we are afflicted, we naturally ask whether the affliction is not because of particular sins of which we have been guilty

Eyes Toward the God of Help

25:15-21



- His enemies that persecuted him were many and malicious and very vicious; it was *with cruel hatred* that they hated him
- Such were Christ's enemies and the persecutors of His church
- *Keep my soul*, He beseeches for protection, in the first place from sin, and then deliverance
- As we pray, *“Lead us not into temptation, but delivers us from evil”*
- *for I put my trust in You*, David has taken refuge in Him and therefore He cannot forsake him, He cannot let him be destroyed
- The present difficulty David endured would not prevent him from trusting and serving God

Eyes Toward the God of Help

25:15-21



- David's praying that integrity might preserve him
- If he means his own, as in Psalm 7:8; then the sense is that God would preserve him, seeing him faithful and upright in the way he governed the people of Israel, and they had rebelled against him without a cause; Psalm 78:72
- Or he is praying that those *integrity and uprightness* might be continued with him, that he might not be led aside by the corruptions of his heart, and the temptations of Satan
- He wishes to have a perfect heart, and an upright life

Eyes Toward the God of Help

25:15-21



- *integrity and uprightness* Are also God's goodness and His grace to His people, and His faithfulness in His promises
- These are practical safeguards men ought to desire
- Even the ungodly world admits that "honesty is the best policy"



A closing Request 25:22

- A concluding prayer for the nation
- He prays earnestly to God for relief and help for the church
- David's troubles were enlarged, and he was very earnest with God to deliver him, yet he does not forget the distresses of God's church
- It is significant that David could spare a prayer for the *troubles* of others when he was in a season of such difficulty
- We cannot enjoy any comfort in our own safety while the church is in distress and danger



A closing Request 25:22

- It is a prophecy of the sending of the Messiah in due time to *redeem Israel from his iniquities* (Psalm 130:8)
- It may refer also to the joy and comfort of the future state
- In heaven, and in heaven only, will God's Israel be perfectly redeemed from *all their troubles*
- St. Augustine says, ““Redeem Thy people, O God,” whom Thou hast prepared to see Thee, out of his troubles, not those only which he bears without, but those also which he bears within.”



Discussion

- This is an acrostic psalm. What is an acrostic psalm? What are the benefits (at least to the Hebrew audience) of a Psalm written in an acrostic manner?
- Who or what have you placed your trust in as you have gone through life? Have those things proven to be trustworthy? If so, why?
- What does David say about learning from God and understanding His teachings?



Discussion

- What does David say in this psalm about God's ability to save and forgive those who repent and turn to Him?
- On what basis does David ask God to forgive his sins? Why is this important?
- What are the two major causes of David's distress?
- What are David's specific requests concerning his enemies?