

PSALM 94

THE PSALM OF VENGEANCE

This Psalm is a general but most fervent prayer, filled with the feelings of an afflicted and sorrowful heart – grieving that the blood of the Lord’s people is shed with such iniquity and cruelty by the tyrants and hypocrites of this world. Here the Psalmist complains of the wicked kings, princes, priests, and prophets among his own people. “Understand, ye brutish among the people,” he pleads; “and ye fools, when will ye be wise?” He calls these characters “fools” because they are ignorant and impious despisers of God, and because they taught and ruled the people without knowledge and in wickedness. In short, the Psalmist here directs his word against all who persecuted the true prophets and their followers, and slew them with bitter hatred; and yet boasted all the while in God, Who (they said) had given them power, and defended and protected them as magistrates and priests – even though they walked in the ways of wickedness. Against all such persons, the Psalmist burns with holy zeal. He records their own words and expressions as they say, “The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.” Against such evildoers, the man of God earnestly prays that there may be enough of His own people to stand forward for the truth.

In verses 14 and 15, the Psalmist comforts himself and all the Lord’s people with the assurance that – despite the plots and persecution which these wick-

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

Here the writer sees evildoers in power, and he smarts under their oppressions. His sense of the Divine sovereignty, of which he had been singing in the previous Psalm, leads him to appeal to God as the great Judge of all the earth; and this he does with much vehemence and perseverance – evidently tingling under the lash of the oppressor. Confident in God’s existence, and assured of his personal observation of the doings of men, the Psalmist rebukes his atheistic adversaries and proclaims his triumph in his God. He also interprets the severe dealings of Providence to be, in reality, very instructive chastisements; and so he counts those happy who endure them. This Psalm is another pathetic form of the old enigma: “Why do the wicked prosper?” It is another instance of a righteous person, perplexed by the prosperity of the ungodly; but cheering his heart by remembering that there is, after all, a King in heaven – by Whom all things are overruled for good.

In the first seven verses, the Psalmist utters his complaint against wicked oppressors. From verses 8-11, he reasons against their skeptical notion that God did not notice the actions of men. He then shows that the Lord does bless His people and will deliver them, although they may be chastened for a while (verses 12-15). He again pleads for help in verse 16, and he declares his entire dependence upon God for preservation (verses 17-19); and then, for a third time, he urges his complaint (verses 20-21). Finally, he concludes (verses 22-23) with the confident assurance that his enemies – and all other wicked men – would certainly be made to reap the due reward of their deeds; “yea, the Lord our God shall cut them off.”

ed men devise – the Lord will never forsake His people; and in due time, He will stand up as the Righteous Judge to execute true justice. But in the 16th verse, he asks a question: “Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?” He looks out upon the multitude of evildoers; and for a moment, he asks that question which faithless human reason is always suggesting and forever pronouncing unanswerable: “Where shall I find a champion?” As long as our eyes range along the level of earth, they see no deliverer. But the empty earth should turn our gaze to the occupied throne in Heaven, for there sits the Answer to our almost despairing question! Rather, there He stands – as the martyr Stephen saw Him – risen to His feet in swift readiness to help His servants! The Psalmist’s personal experience confirms the hope of Jehovah’s aid (verses 17-18) – for unless He had been the singer’s help in the past, he would not have lived even until this hour; he would have gone down in death. No man, woman, or children who still draws breath is without tokens of God’s sufficient care and ever-present help. The mystery of continued life, in itself, is a witness for God. And not only do the experiences of the past thus proclaim where a person’s help is, but devout reflection on the history of our lives will also bring to light many times when doubts and tremors were disappointed. Therefore, if we feel our foot slipping, and if we fling up our hands toward the Lord; we may be sure that He will grasp them and support us, even in the most dangerous places. When the multitude of our divided thoughts hesitate between hope and fear, God’s consolations work their way into our agitated minds; and then there is a great calm! (verse 19)

The height of crime is reached when rulers use formalities of justice as masks for injustice, and give legal sanction to all kinds of mischief. The ancient world groaned under such travesties of the sanctity of Law; and the modern world is not free from them, either. This raises a question that often tortures faithful hearts: “Can such doings be sanctioned by God?” To the Psalmist, the worst part of these rulers’ wickedness was that – in his moments of doubt – it raised the terrible suspicion that God was perhaps on the side of the oppressors! But when such thoughts came surging upon him, he fell back on the remembrance of what God had been to him in past moments of peril, and he claimed Him to be the same refuge and fortress for himself now. Growing strong in that individual experience and conviction, the Psalmist won the confidence that – far from winking at the evil of tyrannical persecutors – Jehovah would soon overthrow them and root them out. Then Jehovah will not only be known as the God who belongs to and works for the individual soul of each of His sons and daughters; but also as “our God,” Who is the refuge for His whole Church, and Who will never forsake His inheritance!

Lord Jehovah, we praise You as the Righteous and Just Judge, Who will soon overthrow and root out all persecutors and evildoers. Thank You for being our refuge from all these oppressive tyrants! Amen.

