

## Call Upon The Lord

Psalm 141

One of the greatest days in the history of God's people is when Solomon the son of David completed the building of the first temple in Jerusalem.

It took seven years to complete, involved a significant number of labourers, people with great skill in working with materials, and a huge investment of resources.

The incredible effort and investment, I think, reflects the awareness the king had of the importance of what he was building.

A building meant to display the glory of Almighty God should reflect an appreciation for the magnitude of that.

Even with everything he put into the building, Solomon knew the meagerness of his effort.

He says in 1Kings 8:27, "*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!*"

Even the whole universe is too small for God, what is a tiny building in a tiny land in comparison to that?

The king knew that the temple wasn't a house for God to live in, but rather a place to make His visible presence known among His people.

It was one of the tangible ways in which God was showing that He was with His people.

Graciously God shows that He is pleased with the temple by filling it with His visible glory when the ark of the covenant was brought in, so much so that the priests were unable to perform their duties.

Seeing that take place Solomon begins to pray.

He prays with thanksgiving, he prays for blessing upon the people, and he prays about the future.

One of the things he prays about the future is that when the people find themselves in trouble that they would turn towards the temple and cry out to the LORD.

Why would he repeatedly tie the prayers of God's people to the temple when he knows full well that the LORD is not confined to the temple?

Remember God had granted Solomon great wisdom so He knows that the LORD is all knowing and present everywhere at the same time.

Every action, thought, and feeling of every human being who has ever lived has all taken place in the sight of God.

Whether we pray in a church, in the woods, or in a closet the LORD knows it.

So why turn towards the temple?

Because it says something of the desire of the person praying to be in the visible presence of God.

It was a clear way for God's people to show the sincerity of their heart cry to be with the LORD.

It was a tangible way to display calling upon the LORD.

[Without a doubt the time for the physical temple of wood, stone, and gold has passed in light of the work of Christ. Now the people of God are the temple of God on the earth. What is the same, however is that the longing to be with the LORD is still on the hearts of God's people. As we come to the end of 2023 and look ahead to 2024 it seems like a good thing to reflect on our desire for the LORD. To do that we are going to look together at **Psalm 141**. The psalm is all about turning to God, it is about calling upon the LORD. There are three important lessons that regardless of where we may find ourselves this New Year's Eve we all need. Lesson one is that...]

### **Point #1 – People who know their need call upon the Lord. (Verses 1-2)**

It is possible to go through life without giving any regard to God and many people have done that and are doing that, but when our minds are open to the reality of our desperate condition we cry to Him.

#### Look with me at verse 1.

There seems to be a sense of urgency to what is written here.

That seems clear in the word 'hasten'. He is asking the LORD to come quickly to his aid as though he needs this to happen soon.

When he says, "Give ear to my voice" he is asking for something more than for the LORD to be aware of what he is saying, he is asking for the Lord to act on his behalf.

The sense of the verse is, "Hurry, Lord, you need to do something quick here."

While some commentators have made guesses as to what circumstance in David's life is prompting him to call on the Lord, there is not enough here for us to make a firm conclusion and I actually think that is a good thing.

#### I say it is a good thing because if we knew the situation it would likely feed into a common habit among people.

When do we usually call upon the LORD like this? Usually when we are facing some kind of crisis.

There is no shortage of those to choose from in David's life. Franz Delitzsch believed the Psalm was written when David's son Absalom had taken over the throne of Israel.

I'd say your own son wanting you dead is a crisis, but that is far from the only thing that David faced.

It very well may be a particular crisis that causes David to "call upon" the LORD here.

Crisis does tend to make our need of God more obvious, but it is very important that we try to see that it is a huge mistake to limit our calling upon the LORD to times of severe trial.

This is something we need to be doing every day.

We see a hint of that in **verse 2**.

*His mention of incense and the evening sacrifice here likely means that he desires to have his prayers be pleasing to the LORD.*

This is also likely why the people made it a regular habit of reading/singing this psalm at the evening sacrifice and according to commentators it became common in the early church to read this psalm at times of evening worship.

In other words the people of God recognized that this Psalm, the calling upon the LORD, made sense as a regular part of life.

It is a recognition that what becomes clear in a time of crisis is something that is always true in life and that is our need of the LORD.

[How many people enjoyed some holiday feasting over the last week or so? I won't ask for any confessions about who ate too much, I'll only say that I am guilty of it. If there is anyone else here like me then you most likely said something along the lines of, "I really shouldn't have had that second plate." Here is the thing, when we are feeling really full is our need of food at the forefront of our mind? We might be thinking about how delicious supper was, but we are probably not thinking about our next meal. Does that mean we need food any less? No because while it may seem that you don't need to eat for a week, it won't be that long until we are hungry again.]

Our thinking about the LORD can go along similar lines.

When we are living it up and everything is good God may be far from our concerns.

Does that mean we need him any less?

I have observed that many unbelievers will express an interest in God when they are feeling desperate.

They will sometimes show up to church, they will ask for prayer, and they might even blow the dust off a bible.

Do you know what often happens when they get delivered from their situation? God goes back on the shelf.

[What a gift the LORD is giving us when He shows us our need of Him, but oh how we waste it if we don't see our need of Him on a daily basis. If you are a born again Christian, and you need to be if you are going to be right with God, then you know your need of Christ to keep you safe from the eternal wrath of God. You know your need never goes away, you know you need Him all the time. You also begin to understand that you need more than a rescue from the things that are happening to you, you realize that you also, perhaps even more so, need the LORD to rescue you from yourself. That is the second lesson in this Psalm, that...]

**Point #2 – People need the Lord to stay away from evil. (Verses 3-6)**

Everyone who accepts what the bible teaches about our natural desire for bad things understands that we need God to turn us away from the wicked things we want.

What is prayed here is verses 3-4, I believe, is the outworking of the desire to have his prayers and worship be pleasing to the LORD.

These are really good things to pray for, but they are really powerful things to pray in the middle of a crisis situation.

When we face challenges from circumstances and people we can very easily focus our attention there.

We can be quick to ask the LORD To change the situation, change other people, or deal with other people.

Psalms of David, including this one, certainly ask the LORD to do those things, but in this Psalm he begins with what He needs the LORD to do in him.

He first asks the LORD to “guard” and “keep watch” over his words.

If you are into making New Year's resolutions that would be a good one.

To resolve to pray that prayer on a regular if not daily basis.

Careless and ungodly words can do a lot of damage.

In James chapter 3, God's word likens our tongues to an untamable beast, a restless evil, and full of poison.

We need God the Holy Spirit to keep us from that kind of destruction.

In verse four he drills down a little deeper, he talks about the heart.

That is the whole reason bad things come out of our mouths, it is because they are coming from the heart.

Of course it is more than just what we say, it is what we do and so David is calling out to the LORD to keep his heart and his hands from evil.

If left to ourselves we would go after bad things and bad things will come out of our mouths, we need the Lord to keep us from that.

He continues on in **verses 5-6** expressing his desire to be kept from evil.

*He wants the correction of godly people!*

He sees it in verse 5 as “kindness” which translates the Hebrew word hesed which has the sense of loving kindness or faithfulness.

He understands that the discipline of a godly person is a good thing for his life.

He likens it to “oil for his head” which likely should be taken as being honoured or cared for.

In addition to receiving the rebukes of the righteous he declares himself to be against the evil deeds of others.

He prays against evil and he knows that evil “judges”/rulers will meet their deserved destruction if they continue on in their evil ways and that the way of righteousness will be proved right in the end.

That is why he wants the Lord to guard his mouth, and to steer his heart in the right direction, because the way of evil surely leads to destruction.

He is calling on the Lord to keep him from what is wrong and to direct him towards what is right.

[Anyone who wants to be a good parent knows this is true. When children are toddlers they need their parents to hold their hands to cross the street to keep them safe from cars. When a child reaches for a hot stove and good parent takes their hand away. When the child whacks his sibling and takes his toy a good parent will discipline him because he needs to know that is wrong.]

*A wise man has told me on more than one occasion that there is no such thing as adults there are just big children.*

You know that is actually pretty biblical.

Of course we know as believers we are to grow up in Christ, grow in wisdom, and in our love for what is right.

But no matter how much we grow up on this side of eternity we are fighting against our sin nature.

We are fighting against selfishness and pride, against immorality and deceit, against coveting and hatred, and many other evils in this life.

Just like a little kid crossing the road we need the LORD to take us by the hand and lead us in the right direction.

[How would you rate the things that come out of your mouth these days? What kind of company are you keeping? How do you take it when a Godly person shows you where you are going wrong in life? All good things to consider as we begin a New Year. It is good to remember that we need the LORD to keep us from evil. That brings us to one more lesson about calling upon the LORD. It is a good one, it is one we all need and I think that is especially true in the times in which we live. The lesson is that...]

**Point #3 – People who call upon the Lord find hope. (Verses 7-10)**

God always answers the cry of His people in a final sense and because that is true we should never base our outlook for the future on the way things may seem in the present.

*In verse 7 we are reminded of our need of hope.*

Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead and often refers to an actual grave. That is likely what is in view here. Notice the word “our” here in reference to the bones being scattered.

The writer is including himself in this situation and so it seems best to take this as a general reference to death being the fate of all humanity.

That is the bad news and that has been true from the moment Adam disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden.

If it were just physical death that wouldn’t be all that bad.

If it were just physical death then we would simply cease to exist and that would be it.

But the Bible shows us that there is more than physical death there is also spiritual death meaning that people must face the judgement of God.

*Considering that fate this is what the psalmist does (Verse 8).*

Though all of humanity faces death, he looks to the Lord.

Notice he calls God here his “Lord” that is the Hebrew word Adonai meaning Master.

Without a doubt God Almighty is the Master of all things and all people, but when you call God “my Master” it means you are willfully embracing Him as your master it means you want Him as your Lord.

Not only does he find his master in God, it says here he also seeks refuge meaning protection and deliverance.

In other words he believes that in the LORD he can find protection from Sheol or death.

*If you find that then you have truly found hope.*

Jesus Christ shows beyond question that the psalmist's trust in the LORD is well placed.

He died so that we can be forgiven. God will not bring His judgment and wrath against anyone who is in Christ because in Jesus' death that has already happened.

Death both physical and spiritual has no hold on those in Christ because Jesus was raised from death defeating it forever.

There is no greater place of refuge than the cross of Christ and His empty tomb.

Have you found refuge there? You can! You can acknowledge your wicked ways before God and cling to Jesus for forgiveness.

*That is the greatest hope of all and that hope gets applied to present day life in verses 9-10.*

Many are the traps and snares of the wicked.

David knew that well and often times in his life it seemed like the wicked would win, but they never did and they never can in an ultimate sense.

In the end if the wicked do not repent their evil will come back on them.

[One of the great examples of that happening in the bible takes place in the book of Esther. There we are told of a man named Haman who hated the Jews, particularly a man named Mordecai. Hated him so much that he schemed to have all the Jews killed and Mordecai hung on a gallows he had built that was 75 feet tall. In the end it's Haman who ends up on the gallows and God's people are delivered.]

The Bible nowhere says that everything always works out in this life, but it does promise that everything will get worked out in eternity.

Because that is the case we should never fall into despair thinking that the way things are now is the way they are always going to be.

If we let our thinking be shaped by the way things look in the world, then we will be prone to think that evil is winning and is going to win.

That is not true.

Evil will not prevail and even if those who belong to Jesus should perish no harm will come to them in a final sense because the LORD will restore everything and add to that more than we can wrap our minds around.

It is impossible to find more hope than that.

*So as we stand at the end of one year and the beginning of a new one, I urge all of us to call upon the LORD.*

Call upon the Lord because we need Him.

He is not an idol to be taken off and shelf and put back on at our convenience.

He is Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, LORD of all, our great redeemer Who is worthy of our eternal praise, and whom we need every minute of every hour.

Call upon the LORD because as people truly born again we will want what is good and we will know that we need to Lord to lead us in that direction.

Call upon the LORD because in Him alone is the hope of eternal life which is a treasure that cannot be taken away by anyone or anything in all creation.

I have no idea what will happen in 2024, but I do know we can all trust in the One who does.

So then, let us all resolve to call upon the LORD.

Let's pray.