

TRUTH B-P CHURCH
Adults Sunday School

PSALM 6 – THE FIRST PENITENTIAL PSALM

I. INTRODUCTION

There are a total of seven penitential psalms (Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Penitential psalms are psalms of confession which are specially expressive of sorrow for sin. We see three different expressions by the psalmist, namely sorrow (verses 3,6,7), humiliation (verses 2,4), and hatred of sin (verse 8), which are the unfailing marks of the contrite spirit before God.

A. Title

“To the chief Musician on Neginoth upon Sheminith, A Psalm of David.” is the title of the psalm, almost the same as Psalm 4 except another musical instrument is also used being “Sheminith.” Sheminith is an instrument with strings like Neginoth. This added instrument probably would contribute to the mournful tune that would match the expression of the psalm very well.

B. Author

“A Psalm of David.” David is the author. Indeed God's people have benefitted much from the psalms that he had written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A psalm a day keeps the soul awake, alive and enthusiastic. The psalms also have healing power over the soul especially when it is weak, wearied and troubled.

C. Summary

It is obvious that there are two main divisions in this psalm: Prayer (verses 1 to 7) and Praise (verses 8 to 10). However, it is good to divide the prayer section into two sub-divisions to be more specific, namely: Prayer for Mercy (verses 1 to 3), and Prayer for Deliverance (verses 4 to 7). From verses 8 to 10, the psalmist is full of praise for God's promise of triumphant, and the reason being: God answers prayer and no enemy will prevail ultimately. May God help us as we study this psalm in the spirit of humility.

II. PRAYER FOR MERCY

A. Because of God's Judgment Against Sin (verse 1)

Verse 1, “O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.”

What a way to begin the psalm with a plea for God's mercy! The Lord's covenantal name is invoked as there is a relationship that David had with God that is based upon the covenant. It is to the Lord that David is crying out to. No other person is worthy to take God's place. This rightful place belongs to God and Him alone.

The psalmist is not rejecting God's rebuke of his sin. He humbly accepts God's rebuke against him because there is no other way of escaping from God's eyes of judgment. Because God is just and righteous, it is only right and consistent to His holy character that He should judge sin. And so, what is David exactly praying for? He is praying that God while rebuking him, will not rebuke him in His anger. And this was explained in the second part of the verse “... neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure (this is synonymous parallelism!).

Who can stand when God judges in great anger and displeasure? The psalmist recognizes this and prayed earnestly that God will be merciful unto him, not to judge him in a manner of pouring His wrath upon him because of his sins. Reading between the lines, the psalmist could probably wish that God should rebuke him in love and gentleness.

B. Because of Physical Weaknesses (verse 2)

Verse 2, “Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I *am* weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed.”

The psalmist appeals from an angry and just God to a merciful God. Nothing else can give him comfort and satisfaction until he receives mercy from God. He did not try to justify his own actions or words that could have been deemed as righteous. Instead he asked for mercy. For he knew he will be found guilty. There is no way out for him except God's mercy. David knew that he needed God's mercy to become strong again. The word “weak” here could include both physical and spiritual weaknesses. He acknowledges that he is weak which he has no more or little strength left. He wants to be strong again. And therefore he asked God to heal, restore and made him complete again.

Bones are known as the foundation or structure to the body. In other words, the psalmist is feeling the pain all over the body. The word “vexed” is usually used in relation to mental disturbance or frustration. It is interesting here that the word is used to describe the bones being vexed. The physical weakness is so bad that it frustrates the entire body framework.

The question must be asked: why is the body weak? The reason why the body is weak is due to a spiritual problem. Because of sin. Sin can cause the physical body to weaken. Do not underestimate the spiritual problem to affect the body physically. This is probably how stress or depression came about. A mental problem can bring about a physical breakdown or shutdown of the physical body. It is serious. But the good news is: God can heal. And the psalmist knew that God can heal him.

C. Because of Spiritual Weaknesses (verse 3)

Verse 3, “My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long?”

Not only the spiritual problem can cause the physical body to breakdown, the soul is about to give up soon. It is too trying, torturing, and going crazy. The soul is that which is invisible, unseen to the naked eye. Yet we know it is there. The soul could refer both to the mind and heart. Mentally, it is sort of breaking down. Emotionally painful, it is desperately gasping for some of relief. But there is no help available except God. Only God can provide the solution to the problem. Only He can give strength to the soul that it may be well again.

There is no doubt in the mind of the psalmist that the solution lies with God. God can definitely deliver him. However the question is: how long. When will God deliver him? By asking such a question reveals his dire desperation. God must help, if not he will die. Will He help? The psalmist is not going to take for granted that God must definitely help him. He is pleading that God be merciful to help. He is in no position to demand and command what God should do. The psalmist knew his place. All that he could do is to ask for mercy. He certainly deserved to suffer and perish. But he asked for mercy which he did not deserve.

God is not a backup for him. God is everything to him. Without God, he is “finished.” Like the psalmist, we must all arrive at this “dead end” in which only God can give us the “light at the end of the dark tunnel.”

III. PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE

A. Because of the Importance of God's Presence (verses 4 to 5)

Verse 4, "Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake."

It may seem like the Lord had left him and now the psalmist is calling for God to return to him. Is this the case? From God's perspective, He has never left him. But from the psalmist's perspective, he felt God's presence is missing. This is to be expected because God will always turn His face away when there is sin. This is not a contradiction to His nature being omnipresence as He is present everywhere. Due to sin, God withdraws His blessing, care and love until there is repentance. The psalmist needs God to turn His face unto him again, which is why He pleaded God to return.

The soul here could mean life. The psalmist is pleading God to save his life. It is likely that both the external and internal turmoil are too much for him to bear. It is overwhelming. And he seeks the Lord to save him.

The psalmist is not counting on anything that is good about himself that God should save him but by His mercies alone. The mercy is in the plural means God's mercy is plenty. It is not limited or lacking. They are many and will never lack.

Verse 5, "For in death *there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?"*

The psalmist gave his humble reason for the appeal to God to save his life. We see synonymous parallelism in this verse. Death refers to being buried in the grave. This is the end of all living persons on earth. Death is no respecter of persons. It can happen to anyone, anywhere and anytime. At death, everything comes to a stop. The time to cease from all manner of work has come. It is not a matter of choice. It is by default! No man can stop death from coming, not even the doctor! The psalmist used this reason of death to persuade God to let him live so that he can remember God by giving thanks to Him. Is this a good and valid reason? Will God "buy" it?

Is it because the psalmist is afraid of death, that's why he is pleading God to save his life? We find no inclination at all toward this fear of death in this psalm. Instead verse 5 is the reason why his life ought to be preserved. Let us also not see this humble reason as a threat to God. God is not a little boy who needs to be coaxed.

Since David is going through tough times and most trying moments, is it not better for him to be relieved of all these troubles and be found in God's presence in heaven forever? Should he not pray that the Lord should take him home immediately? If this is David's desire, he should have prayed this prayer, but he didn't.

Instead he prayed for God to save his life. Why? David truly wanted to give thanks and praise the Lord as long as he lives. It is a matter of time that he will depart from this world and forever be with the Lord. He would then be able to praise God for eternity. However it is at this side of heaven that matters to the psalmist for he desired God to save his life so that he may praise Him while still on this earth. One who is dead in the grave is unable to give thanks. The giving of thanks serves also as a testimony to the unbelieving world that God is true and sovereign, and is to be praised all the time. But if a believer is dead in the grave, his testimony will be of a past and not present continuously.

The psalmist's humble reason for God to save his life is a valid one. It is this life which God has given us the opportunity to testify for Him. When the time is up to be called home to be with the Lord, the opportunity to testify will end as well. In this verse, we can sense the evangelistic endeavour that the psalmist had even in the midst of sorrow and overwhelming struggles.

B. Because of Overwhelming Struggles (verses 6 to 7)

Verse 6, “I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.”

This verse describes how trying and tough David was going through. Imagine he got so exhausted with his own crying. It goes beyond words to imagine the kind of overwhelming struggles he was going through. He cried non stop. None can comfort him. None can give him the shoulder strong enough for him to lean on. He wallowed in his own sorrow for the whole night by himself.

Verse 7, “Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.”

Even his eyes were affected. Surely his eyes became swollen after all the crying. Such overwhelming struggles could have killed him right there and then. There is no immediate solution. There is no immediate relief. It waxeth old means that his sight has become that of an old man who has poor eyesight. Prolonged crying has caused his eyes to swell and unable to see clearly. And the reason for the crying is because of his enemies.

What did his enemies do to cause him to sorrow so greatly and intensely? These enemies could have been his own people, his loved ones and family, or even strangers from other pagan nations. It could have brought him much pain when he witnessed with his own eyes how his trusted friends or his own children betrayed him and attacked him mercilessly. Whatever it is, the psalmist is overwhelmed with all these struggles. If not for God's enduring grace, he could have taken his own life already. For from verses 8 to the end, we witnessed the “change” in David's tone, from sorrow to full of praise that is built upon by unmistakable confidence in God.

IV. PROCLAMATION OF TRIUMPH

Without the remaining three verses, Psalm 6 would be a psalm with no hope of relief at all. We see the proclamation of triumph in these verses. There are two reasons for the proclamation: first is because God answers prayers. Second is because no enemy will prevail ultimately. This is definitely needful for every child of God to arrive at this point because there is a hopeful closure to every trial and testing.

A. Because God Answers Prayers (verses 8 to 9)

Verse 8, “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping.”

'Note the sudden change of tone, very characteristic of the Davidical psalms. The psalmist, having offered his prayer, is so certain of its acceptance that he at once turns upon his adversaries with words of reproach, and almost of menace. "Depart from me!" he exclaims; "get ye gone! do not dare any more to persecute me or plot against me! Your efforts are in vain." **For the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.** David speaks from an inward conviction. He knows that he has prayed sincerely and fervently. He is certain, therefore, that his prayer is heard and accepted.' (Pulpit commentary).

Verse 9, “The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer.”

Not only the psalmist has confidence that his prayer is heard, he believes that God will answer his prayer. There is a 3-fold repetition (one in verse 8 and two in verse 9) that marks the psalmist's conviction that God indeed will answer the prayer of His children.

God will respond to the psalmist's weeping (verse 8), supplication (verse 9) and prayer (verse 9) in the affirmative.

B. Because No Enemy Will Prevail Ultimately (verse 10)

Verse 10, “Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return *and* be ashamed suddenly.”

This is the second reason why the psalmist is so hopeful. Who can fight God and win? It must be that the psalmist's enemies are also God's enemies. Otherwise there is no biblical basis why God must deal with our enemy. Sometimes we “create” our own enemies not because of our faith in Christ. Enemies can come about due to jealousy, hatred, or something personal. We should not have such enemies in the first place, especially when we are all in the same church, bearing the name of Christ. We should put away all our personal differences and unite ourselves as God's people.

Rather, God's enemies are our enemies. They are those who hate Him, despise His Word, and reject His sovereign rule and power over them. We have many of such people in the world. And therefore all God's enemies are our enemies.

The word “ashamed” means “to be brought to see their own folly.” It is truly reasonable for the psalmist to pray and hope that his enemies will be brought to see their own folly, and probably hope that they will turn to God and repent. “Sore vexed” means that whatever they hope to accomplish will be frustrated and not succeed. There is no blessing to all who go against God and those who are on His side.

The psalmist desired that his enemies to return to the right path. This could strongly indicate that the enemies here are the Jews themselves. It is sad that they had foolishly turned against God by attacking David unjustly. Be ashamed suddenly means that they should be brought to see their own folly immediately. There is no time to lose. The sooner their wicked plan and attacks stopped, the better it is for David.

V. CONCLUSION

David knew his God. It is based upon such intimate knowledge of God that he found much relief for his soul and body. No doubt he came before God in such overwhelmed conditions that had him driven to desperation. He must realize that there is no help available except God. The moment he believes there is help from elsewhere, he will not see the need to seek God at all.

Many a time God wants us to approach Him with the attitude that His help is the only help we want and hope. He does not want to be a backup. He does not want us to turn to Him only when no other help is available. He does not want to be the emergency button for us to remember and press only when needed. He wants us to go to Him all the time, even in time when solutions are easily available.

Going to God for help simply means we need Him and Him alone. The opposite is true. If we do not go to Him, it means we do not need Him. We are saying we are able to cope without God. Let us learn from David and walk close with God all the time. May God help us. Amen.