

HEAR ME FOR I AM YOUR SERVANT

Psalm 143: 1-12 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), American evangelist, publisher and founder of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, once asked Andrew A. Bonar (1810-1892), of Scotland, “What’s the secret of your ministry?” Andrew Bonar replied, “For 50 years I have had access to the throne of grace.” What did he mean? He meant he was free to pray to the Lord, and He did for 50 years. We come today to Psalm 143 with a lesson on prayer like Psalm 142, but in other ways, different and unique. Why are so many psalms lessons on prayer? The psalmist in Psalm 143 again was in a difficult trial; he cried out to God; God answered him; and he praised God. Do we need repeated lessons on prayer? The answer is yes! Why? It is because many believers do not handle trials wisely. When many believers encounter various trials, they get angry with God and fall away from the faith. When I was with Jinny at Mayo Clinic in 1974, after 2 and a half weeks of medical scans, tests, with fasting from solids and liquids, we were exhausted and heading home with no cure for my bout with an A-strain flu. The doctor in our final interview said, “We have a medical revolution every seventeen years. Come back and we may have more answers.” As we drove south through Rochester, Minnesota, there was a huge tent with signs. The signs read, “So Mayo couldn’t help you. We can! Come in and find your cure.” It was a Buddhist tent. We kept on driving home.

Do Christians turn to false teaching for physical healing? They sometimes do. A California pastor this past Thursday wrote about a couple in California. The wife suffered from chronic back pain. The pastor was chatting with her husband when he said that he and his wife were going to a Science of Mind group, providing his wife with some pain relief. The pastor told the husband that this group is heretical. His dear friend replied, “My wife is in pain. This group gives her relief from pain. We’re going there!” The pastor said, “I’ve never seen them again.” Does it matter to you what a help group believes before you ask them for help? Science of Mind teaches the Bible is not the literal Word of God. They teach that Jesus is a great teacher, but not the Lord and Savior of all who repent, believe and receive Him. They deny there is a devil who exists, they deny the existence of sin, or of heaven or hell. Does it matter where we find help in times of sickness or trials? Where did Israel’s first king, King Saul go to for counsel? It was to the witch of Endor.

So what is the background of Psalm 143? Is it another cave David wrote from? The Septuagint – The Greek translation of the Old Testament, adds in the psalm’s heading and inscription, “A Psalm of David when he was fleeing from his son Absalom.” If that is the situation, it might help to explain David’s painful request in verse 2, “Enter not into judgment with Your servant for no one living is

righteous before You.” We know that part of the discipline for David’s sin with Bathsheba was Absalom’s rebellion. II Samuel 12: 11-12, tells how Absalom robbed David temporarily of his kingship in Israel. Nathan prophesied to David, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.” If this is the background, David may be connecting his present trial in which he wrote Psalm 143 with his own previous failure as a husband, father and king—as he committed adultery. But verse 3 of Psalm 143 says, “For the enemy has pursued my soul. He has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness, like those long dead.” Those words sound more like David’s situation when he was hiding from Saul in caves. Whatever the exact background there was for Psalm 143, David’s language is clear enough we all can identify with him.

David was in a severe trial. He desperately needed God to hear and answer him. If your trial is a life-threatening disease, a need for employment, facing a difficult person, or a powerful sin that keeps defeating you, David’s pattern of prayer will be helpful to you. As I have pondered this psalm and meditated on it prayerfully, I see it as a two-part prayer which can be a pattern for us all in times of trouble. Part One in verses 1-6 is – Here’s my heart, Lord! Part Two in verses 7-12 is – Here’s My Hope, Lord! I believe David’s pattern of prayer gives us a pattern we could well begin today in all our times of trouble. Let’s examine this pattern together.

HERE’S MY HEART, LORD (I.) David’s heart was to face his overwhelming trials with humble, believing, obedient prayers to God that sought not only relief from the trial, but also to know God better. Notice v. 10—This was the man after God’s own heart. This first pattern is a three-fold plea: ***Hear my prayer for mercy***—v. 1-2 “Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in Your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with Your servant, for no one living is righteous before You.” This first plea of David’s heart is no small cry of his heart. Standing before the Lord is a marvelous privilege granted to us as believers by God’s grace. This plea for mercy is a plea for God to be faithful in answering him—v. 1 and to answer him in righteousness. Beloved, when we put our heart on the line with God, we ought to know we also are putting God’s promises and His character on the line. God is faithful in all of His ways and righteous in all of His answers. David is putting his heart on the line with God because He is trusting in God’s character which is unchangeable. But in the back of David’s mind and heart is the sincere knowledge that his situation was painful beyond belief. The depth of David’s pain was that he knew if God gave him what he deserved, if his merit were the issue, he had no way to receive God’s help. On

David's merit, as with us, his cause and our cause is hopeless. So in verse 2, David is pleading with God not to make an issue out of what he deserved. All David could muster was the fact that he was God's servant. Also, David reminded God of what we all must know. No one living is righteous before Him. Did you know Paul was quoting David from Psalm 143: 2 in Romans 3: 20 & 23 where we read, "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." David's only plea for mercy in his dire situation was that he belonged to the Lord. He knew he was God's servant. That's why he prayed in verse 2, "Enter not into judgment with Your servant." When that great man of God, Thomas Bilney was burned at the stake under King Henry VIII, on August 19, 1531, he recited Psalm 143 by heart and repeated three times the version of v. 2 he knew—"Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." What a prayer for mercy that was! Plea # 2--

See my plight within me—v. 3-4 "For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead. Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled." When we say, "Here's my heart, Lord," we'd better specify the dire details of our situation. It's as simple as being out hunting. As you try to straddle a huge washout, the soil is still slick and your mighty four-wheel drive pickup slips on one side into the washout that is two feet deep. It high centers you. It breaks your drive-line. Do you walk to the top of a ridge and call a good friend and say, "Hey, we're having a grand time out elk hunting and wondered if you would like to come out and join us before dark?" No, if you are wise, you spill out your plight—every detail, with the best directions possible for your good friend to come to find you. You cry out for ropes, a winch, and every tool you can think of. You tell God all the details of your plight saying, as v. 4, "My spirit faints within me; my heart is appalled." Plea # 3--

Quench my thirst for You—v. 5-6 "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that You have done; I ponder the work of Your hands; I stretch out my hands to You; my soul thirsts for You like a parched land. Selah" This is a great time as you put your heart on the line with God to remind Him of miracles He has performed for you in the past. This isn't remembering the good old days which weren't so good. No, this is your thirst on the line for one more miracle. You are pondering what God has done before and what He is still able to do again. This might be a time when you'll be waiting quite a while for God's answer to arrive—as that friend with a winch might be 3-5 hours from where you are caught in a washout-high centered and it's getting cold. Perhaps it's snowing now. It's time to put your heart on the line with the Lord. Let me tell you a story from back in 1980. Jinny and I were out deer hunting on Pine Butte with its big bucks sighted earlier there in

the summer. We had our three oldest girls, but Gretchen was only 3, Heather was 7 and Amy was 10. We were on that lone road that slants along the west side of Pine Butte, a road that is notorious if it snows. The weather seemed fine and then a storm blew in fast. It started to snow, so we started back north on that 4-wheel drive trail. Half way back on that slanted trail, the snow was pelting down and the left end of our Jeep Wagoneer slipped over the side of the road. There were aspens down a-ways below us, but I didn't want to roll the vehicle. We were stranded and almost afraid to move in the vehicle. Three hours later, the snow was about a foot deep. We had no cell phones back in those days. It was a late Saturday afternoon with evening coming soon. We ate some of our stash of food, and the snow was still pelting down. We were stretching out our hands to the Lord and pleading to Him for mercy. We tried to keep the children calm and ourselves too. Heather remembers playing teacher in the back of the Wagoneer. I remember that we sang some worship songs. We saw my first white mink ever in Wyoming jumping in the snow. It was beautiful, but it was frightening with my family at risk. I haven't hunted that slanted road on Pine Butte ever since. But be certain—all five of us were praying. Then we heard a noise. A man was pulling out with a winch a man whose vehicle had rolled. He wouldn't venture to pull us out but he took us home.

That oil field worker took us home to Rock Springs. The next day, some men here at the church that was located then on Second Street, took me back to Pine Butte and they tied themselves off to a tree and winched me out. Those kinds of times, the words of praise songs do us well. A praise song for those kinds of times of trouble is "Here's my heart, Lord," by Lauren Daigle. Here's my heart, Lord [x3] Speak what is true [x2] I am found, I am Yours I am loved, I'm made pure I have life, I can breathe I am healed, I am free Here's my heart, Lord [x3] Speak what is true Cause I am found, I am Yours I am loved, I'm made pure I have life, I can breathe I am healed, I am free You are strong, You are sure You are life, You endure You are good, always true You are light breaking through Oh, here's my heart, Lord Here's my heart, Lord [x2] Speak what is true!" Pattern # 2 in prayer is:

HERE'S MY HOPE, LORD (II.) David's hope was also a three-fold expectation: ***Show Your face to me***—v. 7-8 "Answer me quickly, O LORD! My spirit fails! Hide not Your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit. Let me hear in the morning of Your steadfast love, for in You I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul." Notice David didn't apologize for asking God to move quickly. He says in v. 7, "Answer me quickly, O Lord. My spirit fails." What's the hurry, you ask? Notice back in verse 3. "For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead." Is that dire? It is dire! So, asking God to do something quickly is truly wise here. How quickly? In v. 8, David is praying for an

answer for God's steadfast love, His hesed, in the morning. That's soon. On Pine Butte, we were praying for God to answer us quickly, and we needed help that afternoon and evening. Be specific, beloved. You can tell God, bring me help this evening or by tomorrow morning. Notice the last words in verse 7—"Don't let me be like those who go down to the pit." David was saying, "Don't let this crushing situation be the end of my life. Don't let me die prematurely. Then he prayed in verse 8, "In You I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you, I lift up my soul." It is very easy in a time of intense trial just to focus on the need for relief, rather than to use the trial to get to know God better. Often, we ask, "Lord, why is this happening to me?" But the better question is, "Lord, how can I get to know You better through this trial? Lord, give me a teachable heart, so that I come to know You better. Lord, don't let me miss the lessons that You want me to learn! Make me know the way I should go, for to You, I lift up my soul. As John Piper prayed when he was diagnosed with cancer in 2006, "Lord, don't waste this cancer on me!" He wanted to learn what God was trying to teach him. He also said, "This news has, of course, been good for me. The most dangerous thing in the world is the sin of self-reliance and the stupor of worldliness. The news of cancer has a wonderfully blasting effect on both. I thank God for that. The times with Christ in these days have been unusually sweet."

All of these words I have encapsulated under the words, "Show Your face to me," or "Hide not your face from me." Martin Luther remarked on this text, "Pagans don't care if God frowns or smiles at them. But David was no pagan. He was praying for God's smile." I agree. As in the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6: 24-26, we need to pray this prayer often for others. "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." But I want to tell I pray this for myself and my family. You can pray it even for yourself. Just say, "Lord, bless me, and keep me, Lord, make Your face to shine upon me, and be gracious to me. Lord, lift up Your countenance upon me and give me peace." Over a hundred years ago, the hymn writer, Emma Frances Shuttleworth Bevan wrote the most beautiful words that reflect this plea for God's face, or God's smile. She wrote: "I have seen the face of Jesus Tell me not of aught beside; I have heard the voice of Jesus—All my soul is satisfied. In the radiance of the glory First I saw His blessed face, And forever shall that glory Be my home, my dwelling-place." The second hope is:

Let Your Spirit lead me—v. 9-10 "Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to You for refuge. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God. Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground!" This level ground is the way that God knows how to lead us around our obstacles of every sort. That's His level ground. God has a path not just from David's cave to David's crown, but from your cave, your

calamity, your collapse, your chasm, your catastrophe, your controversy, and your crushing critics—a path for you to His unbroken calm, His courage, and His care. Just pray with David, “Let Your Spirit lead me.” God will deliver us from our enemies when we flee, v. 9 to Him for our **machceh**, our refuge. This leading of the Spirit involves us being teachable and trainable as we learned in Psalm 141. Dr. Lawrence O. Richards writes, “When you can’t change your situation, make it your priority simply to do each hour, each day, what God wills.” Dr. G. Campbell Morgan reminds us “There is no phrase more often used among Christians than that of the will of God.” Dr. Morgan concluded his classic titled, *God’s Perfect Will*, in the following way, “There is but one thing that matters, knowing and doing God’s will.” Dr. J. Vernon McGee, once commented on this verse 10, saying, “Teach me to do thy will; for You are my God” should be the daily prayer of every child of God. If your service is according to the will of God, no matter how insignificant it may appear to men God will reward you. Your service may be invisible to men, but God takes notice.” The last hope of David is:

Preserve Your servant from trouble—v. 11-12 “For Your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In Your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble! And in Your steadfast love You will cut off my enemies, and You will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am Your servant.” David who was crushed in the beginning of this psalm in verse 3, is quickened, revived at the end. He was claiming preservation and deliverance would come for the sake of His name—v. 11. David was beginning at the end of this psalm to see the road from his cave to the crown. He says, “In your righteousness (that he claimed in verse 1), bring my soul out of trouble! And in God’s hesed, His steadfast love that he called for in the morning in verse 8, David declared in certain expectation, saying, “In Your steadfast love, You will cut off my enemies, v. 12 and “You will destroy all the adversaries of my soul. Then David runs back to His earliest thoughts in his plea for mercy saying, v. 12, “For I am Your servant.

I remember the haunting worship song of Larry Norman, “I am a servant. He wrote: “I am a servant, I am listening for my name I sit here waiting, I've been looking at the game That I've been playing, and I've been staying much the Same When you are lonely, you're the only one to blame I am a servant, I am waiting for the call I've been unfaithful, so I sit here in the hall How can You use me when I've never given all How can You choose me when You know I'd quickly fall So You feed my soul and You make me grow And You let me know You love me And I'm worthless now, but I've made a vow I will humbly bow before thee O please use me, I am lonely.” David could have sung that song, and so could we. We’ve all come short of the glory of God. Pray, “Here’s my heart, Lord!” “Here’s my hope, Lord!” I am Your servant. My heart thirsts for You. My hope rests in You!

Are you one of the Lord's servant's? The Lord's servant is not perfect. David was not perfect, but he was married to the will of God. He prayed in Psalm 143: 10, "Teach me to do Your will for You are my God. Let Your good Spirit lead me." Those are the words of a servant. That's why David would not slay the Lord's anointed. You see. It's possible to hear without listening, to watch without seeing and to be present and yet be absent. Our minds can be far away—as we can be wandering adventurers. For a servant, nothing deserves more attention than the Word of God. The receiving of the Word consists in two parts, attention of our minds and the intention of our will.

Paul says in II Timothy 2: 24, "The Lord's servant must not strive, or be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone." Paul told us in Philippians 2: 5, 7, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...who took upon Him the form of a servant.." Perhaps Jesus identified John the Baptist as the greatest of all His servants in Matthew 11: 11, saying. "Of those born of men, no one is great than John the Baptist. Nevertheless, the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." Why did Jesus speak so highly of His forerunner, His messenger, His servant? Matthew 3: 13-15 gives us the answer. "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me? But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he (John) consented." Beloved, servants have opinions, standards and a sense of place like the servant John the Baptist. But when he found himself face to face with a request from Jesus to obey Him, what did he do? He consented. He changed his mind and will. True servants always change their minds either quickly or slowly as Abraham did after 24 years, but true servants do change their minds and do the Master's bidding. Are you one of the Lord's servants? Then pray, "Here's my heart, Lord!" "Here's my hope, Lord!" Amen.