

February 16, 2009

Psalm 142 (ESV)

**With my voice I cry out to the LORD;
with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.
I pour out my complaint before him;
I tell my trouble before him.
When my spirit faints within me, you know my way!
In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.
Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul.**

**I cry to you, O LORD;
I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."
Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low!
Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!
Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!
The righteous will surround me,
for you will deal bountifully with me.**

Tradition says that David wrote this psalm based on the time when he fled from Saul and hid in a cave. Imagine going from shepherd boy to king's attendant to military leader to fugitive in a cave. Sometimes our lives take unexpected turns that surprise us, disappoint us, and cause us to stop and re-evaluate what it is that God is doing with us. It must have been that way for David, too.

In this case, David did not fight back; instead, he cried to God for protection. The impressive thing about David here is that he never lost his faith; he never even seemed to doubt that God would deliver him and reestablish him. The sad thing is that Saul—who should have been his friend and confidant—proved to be his persecutor. But there is always hope in God. He watches, he hears, he oversees and superintends in ways that we cannot know. David eventually experienced God's blessings. Saul, on the other hand, planted the seeds of his own destruction. But David didn't know this would happen while he hunkered down in the damp darkness of this cave. While he knew despair, he did not fall victim to it. His God was never out of earshot, and David pled to the Holy One for justice and deliverance.

But where does that leave us when we're reduced to hiding in a cave? How do we repair our strained relationships? Or, in more dire situations, how do we protect ourselves from our persecutors? Sometimes, like David, we have to seek a safer place for awhile. We cannot always change people whose views have hardened against us. We've seen this in marriages where egos reign, in the rebelliousness of children who disregard their parent's wisdom, even in churches where brothers and sisters cannot find a way to humble themselves and look out for the interests of one another. But David's attitude is the one we should pursue.

David knew that Saul's flaws had overcome him. Yet David never quit loving him. Even when he had opportunities to take revenge, he refrained. He never gave up on God's anointed even when he had chances to remove Saul from power. His is a wonderful example of fidelity and godliness in the face of injustice. This kind of self-sacrifice seems unnatural. But so was the cross for Christ. May God surround us with the righteous and deal bountifully with us all.

Patrick Barber