

WHERE COULD I GO BUT TO THE LORD?

PSALM 25:1-7

Introduction:

There is a line in a familiar Southern Gospel song that found a place in my heart years ago. It says simply, “Where could I go but to the Lord?” The first section of this beautiful psalm reflects the same sentiment.

j. b. coats wrote both the lyrics and the music to the familiar Gospel song:

Living below in this old sinful world

Hardly a comfort can afford

Striving alone to face temptation so

Now wont you tell me

Where could I go but to the lord

Where could I go oh where could I go

Seeking the refuge for my soul

Needing a friend to save me in the end

Wont you tell me

Where could I go but to the lord

Life here is grand with friends I love so dear

Comfort I get from gods own word
Yet when I face that chilling hand of death
Wont you tell me
Where could I go but to the lord

Where could I go but to the lord
Where could I go oh where could I go
Seeking the refuge for my soul
Needing a friend to save me in the end
Wont you tell me
Where could I go but to the lord

“Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee.” He has concluded that there is no one who can help him except the Lord. He alone is able to meet the basic needs of his life. To “lift up my soul” is to look to the Lord in my time of need. It is to honor the Lord and Him alone.

The first eleven verses of this psalm are actually a prayer in which the psalmist lifts his soul. As I thought about the kind of world in which we live, it occurred to me this could be a good prayer with which to begin each new

day. It encompasses in three petitions most of the major needs that we will face in this life. It is surely an encouragement to my heart at the beginning of each day. It is amazing that in spite of the distance of our world from the world of the Psalmist, we still face the same needs. Everything has changed, and yet nothing has changed.

In the first section of this psalm he points to three life needs that the Lord alone can meet. Interestingly they are the same basic needs that we feel in life. And they are three of the needs that the Lord put in the Disciple's Prayer that we pray so often.

I. WHERE COULD I GO BUT TO THE LORD FOR PROTECTION.

“Let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemy triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause.”

David was never without enemies in his adult life so we cannot be sure about the exact circumstance out of which this prayer came. Some think that it came toward the close of his life. There was always a foe that was seeking to unseat him or to destroy him. Maybe our enemies are different, but we are definitely living life in a hostile environment. Our only hope of safety is in the Lord, so we ask Him to keep us safe in this hostile world

1. From spiritual enemies.

Think about your spiritual enemies. There is one who roams about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He or some of his demons are lurking around somewhere this very day hoping for an opportunity to do you harm spiritually. This is the reason Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptations and deliver us from the evil one.” When you feel threatened spiritually, where else can you go but to the Lord? When the tempter comes, where can you flee for refuge? Only to the Lord of our hearts!

2. From financial enemies.

For those of us who are adults, we are always under threat financially. There are evil persons who spend their waking moments plotting ways to take advantage of you financially. Most of us who have lived very long have fallen into one or more of their traps along the way. Some seek to steal our identity for corrupt purposes; some present products that do not produce for selfish gain; some put together investment schemes that strip us of our assets; some take our money but do not deliver the services we paid for.

What do you do in such a financially hazardous world? Do you try to buy enough insurance to cover every eventuality? Insurance might help, but the best place to go is to the Lord. Seek His help through prayer.

3. From physical enemies.

Then there are physical enemies. Every year adds threatening names to the list of diseases that threaten us. New strains of bacteria are being mutated even as we sit here in church. Some of you have encountered some of these enemies even in the supposedly safe environment of the hospital. According to some studies the hospital may actually be their favorite place to do their work.

Think about the list of physical enemies that have become so prominent in my life time! Cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's, diabetes, Parkinson's and a dozen others! Hardly a week goes by that I do not learn of another physical disease that is new to me.

Where can I go for help in living in such a dangerous world? Only to the Lord! He alone is our Helper and Protector. He is our Fortress and our Keeper. He is wiser and stronger than any enemy that we may face. So we will cover ourselves and those we love with prayer in this New Year. We will lift our soul up to the Lord who is able to save unto the uttermost from all kinds of foes. We will pray with David, "See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you."

II. WHERE COULD I GO BUT TO THE LORD FOR GUIDANCE.

Not only are there enemies from which I need protection, I must also make decisions in an uncertain world. It is not always easy to know the right thing to do. Where can I go when I don't know what to do? Is there a book somewhere that will provide me with an answer? David declared that he chose to lift his soul up to the Lord when he was in the dark about what to do. Listen to his petition:

1. The petition for guidance.

“Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.”

The burden of the petition is rather clear—David wants to know what God wants done in the situation in which he finds himself. “Show me your ways, O Lord;” “teach me your paths;” “guide me in your truth.” There is an underlying commitment in the prayer that if the Lord will show him what is best in the situation he will do it. There is also an underlying confession of the limits on human understanding and wisdom.

One of my favorite prayer promises through the years has been James 1: 5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all

without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt.”

2. The promise of guidance.

David was encouraged in this petition by his confidence in the Lord. Listen to how he expressed his confidence: “Good and upright is the Lord, therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.” And again, “Who, then, is the man who fears the Lord: He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.” And again, “The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.”

O what encouragement! God will turn the world upside down to make His will known to you if you just ask Him with a humble and believing attitude! He never turns away the seeking soul who wants to walk in His ways and to do His will He even guides sinners when they seek His wisdom and guidance.

3. The goal of guidance.

David had a goal in all of this: “May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.” David desired a life that would honor His God—a life of integrity and uprightness—a life of goodness and honesty.

As you face an uncertain world, where can you go but to the Lord? He is the only who can guide you through the minefield through which you must walk, and He will. He delights in sharing His secrets with those who worship Him.

III. WHERE COULD I GO BUT TO THE LORD FOR FORGIVENESS.

Sin and guilt are realities we all know. None of us are without sin, and thus we know the pain and shame of guilt. Where can I go when I know that I have sinned, and that I stand condemned for wrong that I have done? The only place to go is to the Lord.

Notice some important things David sets forth about God's forgiveness.

1. Forgiveness is a lifelong need for each of us.

David begins by remembering the sins of his youth—this is a reminder that sin is a hard thing to forget and an impossible thing to escape. Listen as David prays:

“Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses, for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness sake, O Lord.”

Unfortunately we never out grow sin. David wrote these words as a reigning king, and sin was still a problem. In fact David was like many of us, he did not commit his worst sins in his youth. In fact they happened in the more mature years of his life.

My meditation on the sins of my youth became disturbing. At first I thought that my youth had been fairly innocent, growing up in a good Christian home. But then I took the Ten Commandments and began to measure my early years by the commandments. Soon I became aware that I had broken almost all of the commandments before my sixteenth year of life. I felt fairly comfortable that I had not made a graven image, but the rest of them bothered me. O how I always need his forgiveness!

How are things for you in this day? Are you carrying into this day some shameful memories of failure and sin in the days just past? Do you know where you can go get rid of them? Only the Lord can forgive.

Listen to another aspect of this petition: “For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.” Here the psalmist uses the word iniquity—this is more than some isolated rebellious act. Iniquity points to a twisted nature within that produces the rebellious acts. David feels that his sin is so great that only the LORD of the covenant can set him free.

2. It is the nature of God to forgive when we ask.

David has come to know the nature of God. He has read the books of Moses, and knows of His acts in the past. He knows that God does forgive. He speaks of the “mercy” or “love” of the Lord. This is a covenant word—it refers to being loyal to a covenant and doing what the covenant requires. God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai that declared He would forgive their sins, if they confessed. This part of the covenant is made even clearer and greater in the New Covenant. God has promised never to remember them anymore. Did you notice that lovingkindnesses and mercies are plural? David has many sins, but God has more lovingkindness than we have sins, more mercies than we have iniquities!

David encourages God to remember His love and great mercy rather than his sins. David remembers his sins, and always will, but he wants God to forget them. Remember includes the idea of punishing, or acting in response to his sins. David wants his relationship with God to be renewed through His forgiveness. Being able to walk in God’s ways and gaining goodness in his life is the priority in this prayer.

Let me share with you an insight that the Lord renewed in my heart as I meditated on this passage. God’s forgiveness comes to us when we sincerely repent or turn from the sin. If we are not careful, at least I find myself doing this, we seek forgiveness only because we want relief from the pain and

shame that guilt has brought to our lives. We do not want to be free from the sin, just the immediate guilt. David wanted more than relief from guilt—He wanted a clean heart and a right spirit as he prayed in the fifty-first Psalm.

So the question asked by the Southern Gospel song is, “Where can I go but to the Lord?” When it comes to forgiveness, there is no place else to go.

Humans cannot forgive you, probably would not if they could. Only God has the love and mercy that will enable Him to set your transgressions aside, all of them, and to remember them no more—no matter how great they are.

Do you agree that this will make a good prayer for this day? It might be one that you could pray every day of the year. I think I will make it a part of my daily prayer routine for the rest of my life.

Maybe we need to begin this morning! Where do you feel your greatest need right now? Is your greatest need, the one that keeps you awake at night, protection?

Is your greatest need guidance? Are you deeply concerned about knowing what is right, what God would have you do?

Is your greatest need forgiveness? Or maybe you are like me—you feel all three of them this morning. They are all tangled up in a heavy burden that

rests on your inner spirit, and keeps you for knowing peace and joy as we enter the New Year. What can you do? Why not take it too the Lord, and leave it there? Try lifting up your soul to the Lord God. He will hear you!