

Psalm Sundays

Text
Psalm 41

Topic
King David's frenemies & a close friend
wish he would die from his sickness

Title
"With Friends Like These,
You Need Emanuel"

What is the first thing that pops into your head when I say, "comfort food?"

For me, it's ¼ to ½ pound of spaghetti, thick with marinara sauce, covered with fresh grated Parmesan cheese, followed by a generous slice of Grandma Mary's cheesecake.

There's a scene in the movie *Signs* where the family thinks they might be having their last meal before being overrun by aliens:

- 👤 The little girl, Bo, wants spaghetti.
- 👤 Her brother Morgan wants French toast and mashed potatoes.
- 👤 Uncle Merrill - chicken teriyaki.

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👤 Father Graham says, "I'm going to have a cheeseburger with bacon. Extra bacon."

Comfort is a prominent theme in Psalm 41. King David was on his sickbed. *No one comforted him.* Quite the opposite. His "enemies" and those who "hate[d]" him hoped he would never get up from his sickbed.

That his enemies would be so comfort-less was to be expected. But then there is this, in verse nine: "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me."

No one comforted David. No one on earth, that is. David looked to the Lord to be his Comforter.

You may never be in a distress so lonely that literally no one on earth comforts you. At least, I hope not.

The more important takeaway from Psalm 41, however, is this: The Lord is your constant comforter.

If others comfort you, that is a bonus - but it is not a necessity. I don't say that to excuse our having compassion upon others. We are urged to, "comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (Second Corinthians 1:4).

We are to be comforters. We are also fallible. We can be miserable comforters. Never so the Lord; look to Him first and foremost for comfort.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Are The Lord's Anointed Comforter**, and **#2 The Lord Is Your Ample Comforter.**

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#1 - You Are The Lord's Anointed Comforter (v1-3)

King David was sick. Glance at verse eight, "An evil disease," they say, "clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more."

What do we do when we are sick? We go to the Lord, in prayer, with our requests. David does just that, beginning with verse four. Before he asked the Lord to heal him, he gave his request a three-verse prologue. He rehearsed his own response when others were in distress.

Was he trying to earn his healing, by pointing to his own good works? I don't think so - especially because he will open his prayer by asking the Lord to be merciful to him.

Why this prologue? It shows two things:

1. First - In their response to David's suffering, the people around him were exposed as hypocrites. The sickness was being used by God to reveal the hearts of others. This doesn't necessitate that the Lord caused the sickness - only that He could work with it to make all things work together for the good.
2. Second - We must differentiate between the Old Covenant David was under, and our New Covenant in Jesus. Under the Old, God promised to reward right behavior with physical blessing. David will show that he had behaved righteously toward the sick, thus God should bless Him physically, according to His Word. I'll talk about it more, but now under the New Covenant, believers in Christ Jesus are not promised physical blessings so much as spiritual ones.

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That was a lengthy, but necessary, prologue to David's prologue.

Psa 41:1 To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.

Psa 41:2 The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, And he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.

Psa 41:3 The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.

Remember, this is a song. These first three verses - instead of being a prologue, maybe they were a kind of spoken word intro? If you're having trouble thinking of a song with a spoken word intro, I'd recommend one of the last Johnny Cash songs, *The Man Comes Around*.

Maybe I focus too much on suffering, but the first things I hear in this spoken word are "poor," "trouble," "bed of illness," and "sickbed."

David did not think it strange he might be sick. The physical blessings God promised Israel for obedience did not mean an individual would never get sick, never die.

They did mean David could boldly ask for the things he did in these verses: consideration, preservation, blessing, strengthening, and sustaining.

As for consideration - Sometimes your cause is just a matter of getting it before the right person. As believers, it isn't a matter of discovering the secret spiritual behaviors necessary before God will hear us. That's legalism. We're told to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

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As for preservation - "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39).

As for blessing - Our blessings are spiritual. We have every spiritual resource at our disposal. We tend to look too much on the now, not enough on Heaven. Who remembers *Now&Later* candy bars? You didn't eat it all at once; you saved for later.

"Now&Later" might be a good nickname for believers. We're saved *now*, but we look to what is coming *later*.

As for strengthening - Here are two verses to reflect upon:

2Co 13:4 For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.

2Co 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

God's strength is shown through our weakness.

Sustaining is the byproduct of the Lord's strengthening. The power of Jesus' resurrection is ours to draw upon.

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David comforted the "poor." Not just people in poverty. The word is broad enough to include all type of suffering. One image I've never had of David is him doing hospital visitation. Or making a death notification. He must have done all that.

As God's anointed king, he expressed the anointing by being among the poor.

As Christians, we use the word, "anointed," usually to describe serving that was accompanied by a strong sense of God the Holy Spirit leading it, and present in it.

One more thing, and then I'll be able to make a point. Jesus promised believers He would send the Promise of the Father - God the Holy Spirit - to permanently indwell us. And Jesus called Him, "the Comforter."

My point: Every believer, by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit, is already anointed to comfort others. AND we learn more about comforting as God comforts us in and through our troubles on the earth.

Maybe you've been asked, "What is your superpower?" It's a thing. Whatever else you might say, believers ought to say, "Comforter." Think about it.

#2 - The Lord Is Your Ample Comforter (v4-13)

One of the early Christian rock guys, Benny Hester, had a song that really struck me as a baby believer. *Nobody Knows Me Like You*. One of the lines - "Though some know me well, still nobody knows me like You."

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King David's sickness was compounded by his being abandoned by friends and accused by enemies. He therefore committed himself to the one Person who truly knew him. To the One he knew loved him with an everlasting love, and who would never, ever, leave him or forsake him.

Let's listen to the lyrics of David's sickbed song.

Psa 41:4 I said, "LORD, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You."

The Old Covenant promised blessings for obedience. David, however, didn't demand what was promised. He appealed to God's mercy. God's Law was never intended to promote a legalistic relationship with God. Love was the basis of fellowship. Salvation was by grace - not the works of the Law.

David said, "I have sinned." He wasn't confessing any particular sin. He was acknowledging he was a sinner.

It's possible to say "I'm a sinner," but not really believe it is affecting your life. I see it in marriage counseling, where the husband or wife admits they are a sinner, but selfishly insist nothing in the relationship is their fault.

"Heal my soul" reminds us that our spirit is more important than our body. "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (Second Corinthians 4:16).

For us, "heal my soul" can be a reminder of what we think about the Doctrine of Salvation:

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- 👤 The moment you believe Jesus, you **are** saved.
- 👤 From that precious moment forward, for the rest of your life on the earth, you are **being** saved as you are being conformed into the image of Jesus. We call this ongoing process sanctification.
- 👤 When you are resurrected or raptured, your salvation is **complete**. This we call glorification.

BTW: People who want to impress you refer to the Doctrine of Salvation as *soteriology*.

Psa 41:5 My enemies speak evil of me: "When will he die, and his name perish?"

Psa 41:6 And if he comes to see me, he speaks lies; His heart gathers iniquity to itself; When he goes out, he tells it.

Psa 41:7 All who hate me whisper together against me; Against me they devise my hurt.

Psa 41:8 "An evil disease," they say, "clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more."

Regarding those who "[came] to see" David, one commentator pointed out the following:

The word "me" is not in the original; and perhaps the idea is not that he came to see the sufferer, but that he came to see "for himself," though under pretense of paying a visit of kindness. His real motive was to make observation, that he might find something in the expressions or manner of the sufferer that would enable him to make a report unfavorable to him, and to confirm him in his impression that it was desirable such a man should die. He would come under the mask of sympathy and friendship, but really to find

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something that would confirm him in the opinion that he was a bad man, and that would enable him to state to others that it was desirable he should die.

Thus, frenemies.

These individuals wished David would die. They justified it by thinking he deserved it. Let's just say that such thoughts are not consistent with compassion, and therefore render a person unlike the Lord.

Psa 41:9 Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.

Many of the psalms, which were all written before the time of Jesus, contain details that foreshadowed events in His life. This verse foreshadowed something that happened later with Jesus. As explained in Matthew 26:47-50, Jesus was betrayed by Judas, one of His twelve disciples, on the night before He was crucified.

Scholars give various answers to just how many prophecies Jesus fulfilled in His life, death, and resurrection. The number 300 seems reasonable.

Peter Stoner he looked at the odds of any man fulfilling even just 48 of the 300+/- Old Testament prophecies. The chance of any man fulfilling these prophecies, even down to the present time, is 1 in 10 to the 157th power.

Neither Jesus nor David was giving a lesson in Bible prophecy. These words did not proceed from them without great emotion. They were abandoned in the worst way. "Lifted up his heel" is an expression that means kicked in the face by an animal, e.g., a donkey.

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Rather than think of being abandoned... *Apply the Scripture to yourself as a potential abandoner.* Be a person who is able to say, *You've Got a Friend.*

Psa 41:10 But You, O LORD, be merciful to me, and raise me up, That I may repay them.

Mercy is our certain hope. God won't give those who love Him what they deserve.

What every human deserves is the wages from their sin, which is eternal, conscious suffering in Hell. By His death on the Cross as our Substitute, no believer gets what is deserved.

"That I may repay them" sounds vengeful. Don't forget that David was more than a believer. He was king over Israel; he was the final authority. He had the responsibility to deal with treachery, with treason.

Psa 41:11 By this I know that You are well pleased with me, Because my enemy does not triumph over me.

In David's case, God would raise him from his sickbed. It would be tangible proof that his accusers were in the wrong. It was a little Job in David's life.

We can't read this as a promise God will always give us physical and material prosperity. Or that if He doesn't, that it is a sign we are not walking close with Him.

Neither is biblical. I quoted earlier, from the Book of Romans, that regardless our sufferings, we are always the victors. No weapons forged against us shall stand.

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For us, victory is fiery-furnace victory. It is God's decision to deliver *from* the fiery furnace, or *in* it.

The Lord allowed James to be beheaded... But Peter was sprung from prison, keeping his head.

Psa 41:12 As for me, You uphold me in my integrity, And set me before Your face forever.

God raised David from his sickbed, restored him, and by it exposed the hypocrites.

In the New Testament we have an odd verse, which reads, "For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you" (First Corinthians 11:19).

Similar to David, God can show who is in the wrong by permitting things to play out.

David, as do we, looked forward to being "set before [God's] face forever." The forever worldview of the believer must affect all our thinking and deciding.

Psa 41:13 Blessed be the LORD God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.

In the story of this song, David was still on his sickbed when he made this exclamation of praise. Thoughts of Heaven will do that for you. When you are suffering, sure; that makes sense. But you need to have your heart set on home maybe more so if you are prospering. It is times of blessing that make you soft and susceptible to drifting away from Jesus.

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When people look for comfort, they often seek out those who have had similar suffering. Well, *that would be Jesus first and foremost.* “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Jesus really is ample for you. People are good, too, and are anointed to comfort you.

But nobody knows you like Jesus.

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