

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;*
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 34

*David, in the person of Christ, prayeth against his persecutors;
prophetically foreshowing the punishments that shall fall upon them.*

1. Judge thou, O Lord, them that wrong me: overthrow them that fight against me:
2. Take hold of arms and shield; and rise up to help me.
3. Bring out the sword, and shut up the way against them that persecute me: say to my soul; I am thy salvation.
4. Let them be confounded and ashamed that seek after my soul. Let them be turned back, and be confounded that devise evil against me.
5. Let them become as dust before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord straiten them.
6. Let their way become dark and slippery; and let the angel of the Lord pursue them.
7. For without cause they have hidden their net for me unto destruction: without cause they have upbraided my soul.
8. Let the snare which he knoweth not come upon him: and let the net which he hath hidden catch him: and into that very snare let him fall.
9. But my soul shall rejoice in the Lord; and shall be delighted in his salvation.
10. All my bones shall say: Lord, who is like to thee? Who deliverest the poor from the hand of them that are stronger than he; the needy and the poor from them that strip him.

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11. Unjust witnesses rising up have asked me things I knew not.
12. They repaid me evil for good: to the depriving me of my soul.
13. But as for me when they were troublesome to me, I was clothed with haircloth. I humbled my soul with fasting: and my prayer shall be turned into my bosom.
14. As a neighbor and as an own brother, so did I please: as one mourning and sorrowful, so was I humbled.
15. But they rejoiced against me, and came together: scourges were gathered together upon me, and I knew not.
16. They were separated, and repented not: they tempted me, they scoffed at me with scorn: they gnashed upon me with their teeth.
17. Lord, when wilt thou look upon me? Rescue thou my soul from their malice; my only one from the lions:
18. I will give thanks to thee in a great church; I will praise thee in a strong people.
19. Let not them that are my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me; who have hated me without cause, and wink with the eyes.
20. And they spoke indeed peaceably to me: and speaking in the anger of the earth they devised guile.
21. And they opened their mouth wide against me; they said: Well done, well done, our eyes have seen it.
22. Thou hast seen, O Lord, be not thou silent: O Lord, depart not from me.
23. Arise, and be attentive to my judgment; to my cause, my God and my Lord.
24. Judge me, O Lord my God, according to thy justice; and let them not rejoice over me.
25. Let them not say in their hearts: It is well, it is well, to our mind: neither let them say: we have swallowed them up.
26. Let them blush, and be ashamed together, who rejoice at my evils. Let them be clothed with confusion and shame, who speak great things against me.
27. Let them rejoice and be glad, who are well pleased with my justice: and let them say always: The Lord be magnified, who delight in the peace of his servant.
28. And my tongue shall meditate thy justice, thy praise all the day long.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 34

Explanation of the Psalm

1. "Judge thou, O Lord, them that wrong me: overthrow them that fight against me." A petition for help against persecutors in general. To understand this verse properly we should understand Hebrew, from

were planning to take a hold of his language; and when they saw him nailed to the cross, “they opened their mouths wide,” insulting him, and exclaiming, “Vah, you that destroy the temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it; save thy own self.”

22. “Thou hast seen, O Lord, be not thou silent: O Lord, depart not from me.”

23. “Arise, and be attentive to my judgment; to any cause, my God and my Lord.”

24. “Judge me, O Lord my God, according to thy justice; and let them not rejoice over me.” The Prophet resumes his prayer, repeating it over and over, with a view to move God’s affections. “Thou hast seen, O Lord,” the extent of the oppression suffered by your poor service; “be not thou silent,” as if you either did not see, or were not able, or were not willing, to defend those that hope in thee. “Depart not from me.” Do not desert me in my troubles; nay more, “arise,” and like a just and powerful judge, “be attentive to my judgment,” to the quarrel between me and my persecutors, and “judge me, O Lord, according to thy justice;” that is, if thy justice, which is supreme and infallible, decide that I am unjustly oppressed by my enemies, deliver me from their hands, that they may no longer “rejoice over me.”

25. “Let them not say in their hearts: it is well, it is well, to our mind: neither let him say: we have swallowed them up.”

26. “Let them blush, and be ashamed together, who rejoice at my evils. Let them be clothed with confusion, and shame, who speak great things against me.” He here explains the meaning of a former expression, “let not my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me; who spoke;” for here he asks that they may not be able to “say in their hearts;” that is, to exult over me as if I were extinguished. Nor “let them say: we have swallowed him up;” as if I had been devoured by lions; but, on the contrary, having lost all hope of victory, “let them blush and be ashamed,” everyone of them, and that in no slight degree; but, “let them be clothed with confusion and shame;” these people who “speak great things against me;” who boasted of the power they had over me.

27. “Let them rejoice and be glad, who are well pleased with my justice: and let them say always: the Lord be magnified, who delight in the peace of his servant.”

28. “And my tongue shall meditate thy justice, thy praise all the day long.” As well as the Prophet prayed for the confusion of the wicked, he now prays that the just, the men of goodwill, who wish to keep their innocence, and desire their justice should appear openly, should exult and rejoice. He also exhorts those who are desirous of their own piece, such as will follow from their being delivered from their evils, to praise God. He finishes the Psalm in thanksgiving to God for all his favors. “My tongue shall meditate thy justice;” will be employed in declaring it; which he again repeats, by saying he will spend the “whole day” in doing so; that means frequently, repeatedly. St. Augustine remarks on this passage, that he is always praising God, who is always doing what is right.

End of Psalm 34

which it clearly appears that the verse means; “Judge them that Judge me.” By a just judgment condemned them that unjustly condemned me, such as the chiefs of the Jews, Annas and Caiaphas, and the chiefs of the Gentiles, Pilate and Herod, who judged Christ most unjustly; and many kings and princes who, by most unjust judgments, condemned so many holy martyrs. And because the enemies of Christ and of his Church would have it appear that in their persecutions they were influenced only by a desire of upholding the law, and of acting agreeably to it; while they were, at the very time, acting as professed enemies, instead of impartial judges; and, with an assumption of piety, were only standing by their false superstitions, the Psalm adds: “overthrow them that fight against me;” take up my cause, fight my battles; that when my enemies “are overthrown” by you, I may escape them, and depart the conqueror.

2. “Take hold of arms and shield; and rise up to help me.” An explanation of the words, “overthrow them that fight against me;” and as a warrior ought to be well armed with weapons defensive and offensive, he mentions the former in this verse, and the latter in the next; in the Hebrew the expression is, the shield and buckler; and to avoid a repetition of what appears to be much the same weapon, the Greeks and Latins translate it arms and the shield, that is, arms of protection and defense. The shield and buckler of God signify his good will, according to Psalm 5, “O Lord, thou hast crowned us as with a shield of thy good will.” They likewise signify justice and equity, as in Wisdom 5, “he will take equity for an invincible shield;” and, indeed, the benevolence with which God protects us is a real shield, for, any one loved by God is perfectly secure; and of him can be said, “thou hast crowned him with a shield of thy good will.” The justice of God, called “equity” in the Scriptures, is the shield wherewith he protects from the judgments and the calumnies of the wicked; for, however severely and bitterly God may punish the wicked, he does so in justice, and, therefore, he regards not, and fears not, the sharpness or the bitterness of their tongues, or of their opinions, according to Psalm 50, “that thou mayest be justified in thy words, and mayest overcome when thou art judged;” and of it is said, “he will take equity for an invincible shield;” that is, when he shall come to the last judgment, and take up his arms to avenge himself on his enemies. There was, therefore, much significance in the repetition of the shield and buckler, since God takes up both, to protect us in his mercy and defend himself in his justice.

3. “Bring out the sword, and shut up the way against them that persecute me: say to my soul; I am thy salvation.” He now speaks of offensive arms, and says, unsheathe your sword, and draw it against my persecutors. The word “bring out,” in the Hebrew, signifies a prompt and ready pull, the sword being sharp and in good order, and, therefore, easily drawn, as having no rust on it; “and shut up the way against them that persecute me;” put so many obstacles before them, that they will not be able to come near. The sword signifies the vindictive justice of God, that prompts him to punish the wicked as we read in Deut. 32, “if I shall whet my sword as the lightning, and my hand take hold on

judgment; I will render vengeance to my enemies, and repay them that hate me;" and in Wisd. 5, "he will sharpen his severe wrath for a spear;" for the sword and the spear are arms of offense. Wonderful reflection for a faithful soul, to feel that God stands there armed with sword, shield, and lance, for its protection and hears him speaking to the heart "I am thy salvation." For, though the assurance of the apostle, "if God be for us, who is against us," ought to give us the greatest security, however, the Holy Ghost, to provide more effectually for our weakness, describes God in arms for us; and, in all description of arms, fighting against both the visible and invisible enemies, not only of the Church in general, but of each of the faithful in particular. "Say to my soul: I am thy salvation." God's defense of us; and, therefore, Christ asks for his Church and his faithful, that they may be apprised of such defense; and thereby have the more confidence. And though the term physician may seem to be more applicable to God here than "salvation," still it is, in reality, more appropriate, because physicians and medicine do not always cure, and do not penetrate the substance of what they mean to cure; but God always does; he enters into the very recesses of our souls; and as a man in perfect health cannot but feel so, however destitute he may be in other respects, so it is impossible for the soul, when God is present by his grace, and wishes to heal it, not to be healed, however destitute it may be otherwise.

4. "Let them be confounded and ashamed that seek after my soul. Let them be turned back, and be confounded that devise evil against me." He tells us what is to happen to those against whom God takes up arms, saying, "let them be confounded and ashamed." Let those who thought to slay me be ashamed of losing the victory; for the two words, confounded and ashamed, have the same meaning, as here there is not question of reverential shame, but of the shame suffered by one that has been beaten; "that seek after my soul" is an ambiguous expression, sometimes taken in a good sense. "Flight hath failed me, and there is no one that hath regard to my soul," Psalm 141; that is, I have no refuge; there is no one to know me, to "seek after" me, to defend me. Sometimes it is taken in a bad sense, as in this passage, and in various others, and means to endeavor to take away one's soul, that is, his life. "Let them be turned back, and be confounded." Let them be not only confounded and overwhelmed with shame, but "let them be turned back;" retire in confusion, and conquered, "that desire evil against me;" they who planned my destruction.

5. "Let them become as dust before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord straiten them." He asks, in the third place, that they should not only be covered with confusion, and retire in confusion, but that the thing may be done quickly, and that day may be scattered in various places. Dust is carried by the wind with great force and with great speed to various places; and both force and speed are increased here by the terms used to designate them. For the term used for dust signifies the minutest, finest, lightest dust; and, therefore, the easier impelled; and it is not an ordinary wind that is to drive it, but "the Angel of the Lord, straightening them."

18. "I will give thanks to thee in a great church; I will praise thee in a strong people." Should he be delivered from his enemies, he promises he will not be ungrateful. "I will give thanks to thee in a great church." I will not be silent as to your favors, but in public, before the whole congregation, I will proclaim them, which he repeats when he says, "I will praise thee in a strong people;" for giving thanks and praising are synonymous terms, so are the expressions, "great church" and "strong people." The Church is called great by reason of its numbers, so are the people called strong by reason of their number; for a people may be called strong when its numbers are such that they need have no fear of the enemy. The Prophet would seem to have the Christian Church in view, in which God is daily praised for the delivery of the faithful. The Church of Christ is truly great, spread as it is all over the world, and truly strong, since "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Church triumphant also will be a great Church, consisting, as it will, "of a great crowd, which nobody could count," and of a strong people; for the same passage tells us they will all "have palms in their hands."

19. "Let not them that are my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me; who have hated me without cause, and wink with the eyes." Returning to the prayer he had commenced, he begs to be delivered from his persecutors, especially from the hypocrites, who pretended to be his friends, while they were quite the reverse. "Let not them that my enemies wrongfully," they who, under the garb of friendship, still persecute me; which is the height of malice, to pretend to be one's friend while they are plotting for his ruin. "Rejoice over me;" let them not glory in my downfall. "Who have hated me without cause, and wink with the eyes;" who hate me without any reason, when I did them no harm yet pretend to be my friends, saluting me, nodding at me, winking in approbation of everything I say. St. Augustine asks, what is the meaning of "winking with the eyes?" Expressing, through their eyes, something very different from what they have in their heart.

20. "For they spoke indeed peaceably to me: and speaking in the anger of the earth they devised guile." He now explains the term "winking with the eyes." They addressed me in terms of friendship, while they were bursting with anger within, and "devised guile" to destroy me.

21. "And they opened their mouth wide against me; they said: well done, well done, our eyes have seen it." The Prophet now shows how faithfully he described his enemies, and there fictitious friendship, when the very set who, a little before, were caressing, and winking with their eyes on him, the moment they found he had fallen into the trap they had laid for him, at once "they opened their mouth," and began openly to insult him, and to congratulate each other, "well done, well done, our eyes have seen it;" his downfall we were so long and so anxiously looking for. This was all fulfilled in Christ; sometimes his enemies addressed him in the most flattering manner, "we know that thou art truthful, and that thou teachest the way of God in truth;" at the very time they

content with such impiety, they “came together,” armed with scourges, to destroy me if they could; “and I knew not,” was quite ignorant of their designs; so that I could not take any means to protect myself; or I bore them with such patience as to make one think I was quite ignorant of what they were intending.

16. “They were separated, and repented not: they tempted me, they scoffed at me with scorn: they gnashed upon me with their teeth.” He goes on to relate the malice of his enemies, and says they were not able to accomplish their designs, divine providence having undertaken the protection of his own to save them from harm. That still did not quiet them. What they could not effect by the infliction of personal injury, they sought to effect by foul language, derision, and insults. “They were separated.” The conventicle of those who came together to injure, to scourge me, “was separated,” scattered by the breath of God’s will, but still “they repented not,” as they should have done; on the contrary, “they tempted me, they scoffed at me with scorn, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.”

17. “Lord, when wilt thou look upon me? Rescue thou my soul from their malice; my only one from the lions.” Having thus exposed all his persecutors, he now, in the person of all the just who suffer persecution, returns to prayer, and thereby connects the end with the beginning of the Psalm. And as God, when he neglects to punish the wicked, would seem to overlook them entirely, he says, “Lord, when wilt thou look upon me?” When will you prove to us that you see there wickedness, by punishing it? “Rescue thou my soul from their malice.” Take my life out of the danger it is in, while I am in their power, and make me as secure as I was before; which he repeats and expresses more clearly, when he says, “my only one from the lions.” I have one life only, and therefore, very dear to me; save that by taking it out of the power of my enemies, who, like so many lions, seek to devour me, “gnashing upon me with their teeth.” St. Augustine would apply the expression, “my only one,” to the Church which Christ prays may be delivered from its persecutors. That is true enough, but I think the word should be taken literally here, and that it means his soul, or his life, in the same sense in which we read it in Psalm 21, “deliver, O God, my soul from the sword, my only one from the hand of the dog.” The soul is very properly called the “only one,” as if it were the only object of our love. This temporal life is the foundation of all temporal good, while life everlasting is that of all good, and, therefore, the Lord says in the Gospel, “what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” And yet, such is the folly of many, that for a nothing (material goods) they freely lose that soul that should have been the only object of their love.

6. “Let their way become dark and slippery; and let the angel of the Lord pursue them.” He ultimately asks that they should not only be scattered and compelled to fly but that they should be irremediably hurried on to destruction. Fugitives are favored by a knowledge of the way, by a safe and firm road; or, if the way be slippery, by moving slowly on it. He prays they may have no one of those things in their favor, but, on the contrary, that they may be obliged to fly in “the dark,” and on a “slippery” road, when both eyes and feet will be powerless; with the angel of the Lord pressing on them so urgently that they must, of necessity, be utterly ruined. This has been all fulfilled in regard of the Jews and the other persecutors of Christ and of his Church, who, by the just judgment of God, are enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, and in the slippery ways of concupiscence; and by the “pursuing” anger of God are daily falling into greater sins, and thus hasten in full speed to everlasting misery. This will be more fully developed on the day of judgment, for then the wicked will be confounded and made ashamed in so unspeakable a manner, that they will rush headlong into the infernal pit, under pressure of God’s vengeance; and for ever, and as irremediably as the man who, in the dark, is hurled down a slippery precipice, from which he can never recover.

7. “For without cause they have hidden their net for me unto destruction: without cause they have upbraided my soul.”

8. “Let the snare which he knoweth not come upon him: and let the net which he hath hidden catch him: and into that very snare let him fall.” In the first six verses the Prophet spoke in the person of Christ and of all the just, on persecution in general; he now details three sorts of persecutions, generally inflicted on the just by sinners. First, they harass them by frauds and conspiracies. Secondly, by false witnesses. Thirdly, by open force, and that not confined to mere words. Of the first he says, “for without cause they have hidden their net for me, to destruction.” As, without any provocation on my part, they have been incessantly laying snares for me, I pray God that he may, in his providence, turn those snares to their own destruction. Which imprecation, as we before remarked, is not to be looked upon as an imprecation, but rather a prophecy. God’s providence often brings about such conspiracies to be of more harm to the conspirators themselves, sometimes to harm themselves, alone; like a torch which, set to burn a house, is burned itself before the house; sometimes is burned itself without burning the house at all; thus, the malice of the conspirators at once harms themselves; others, perhaps, not at all; certainly, less than it does the plotters; because injuries suffered are not at all as grievous as the injuries devised. “They have hidden their net for me, to destruction.” They determined to hang me, to destroy me; they set a net to catch me for the purpose; “without cause,” when I did them no harm whatever; “they have upbraided,” offended, abused me; laying snares for me, as if I were a wild beast. “Let the snare which he knoweth not come upon him.” May some unknown, unforeseen calamity, come on himself; may

he fall into the same calamity he intended for me.

9. "But my soul shall rejoice in the Lord; and shall be delighted in his salvation."

10. "All my bones shall say: Lord, who is like to thee? Who deliverest the poor from the hand of them that are stronger than he, the needy and the poor from them that strip him." In these two verses the Prophet describes the unspeakable joy of the just man when he finds himself delivered from those that lay in wait for him. The language is most poetic, metaphorical, and beautiful. The meaning is: when I shall have obtained my prayer; "my soul," through which I live and move, through joy, "shall rejoice in the Lord," in praise and thanksgiving, and will also "be delighted in his salvation," which it sees now secure; or rather, will be delighted in God's salvation, or its Savior; and not only my soul, but my body and all its members, even the lowest and most abject, such as the bones; and not only my bones, but "all my bones" even the very smallest of them will rejoice, and, if they could speak, would exclaim, Lord, is like to thee? For there is nothing on earth or in heaven more powerful, more kind, more wise, or more amiable than you, who so powerfully and so mercifully rescue the poor from the grip of a much more powerful enemy, who sought by violence, to take away not only his property, but his life. "All my bones shall say" is similar to the expression in Psalm 102, "bless the Lord, O my soul: and let all that is within me bless his holy name;" signifying the perfect joy that fills up the entire man. For sometimes the soul is in joy while the body is in pain, and then the joy is not complete and perfect; but when "God shall heal all our languor," and "fill up all our desires in good things," then, at length, shall the entire man, inspired by an unspeakable pleasure, diffused through all his members, even through his insensible bones, say to the Lord, "who is like thee?" As insensible things are said to thirst when they need their necessary support, according to Psalm 62, "for thee my soul hath thirsted, for thee my flesh, O how many ways;" thus, the same insensible things, when their wants are applied, may be said to rejoice and be glad. "Who is like to thee?" Who is equally disposed or powerful to "deliver the poor from the hand of them that are stronger?"

11. "Unjust witnesses rising up have asked me things I knew not."

12. "They repaid me evil for good: to the depriving me of my soul." The Prophet now comes to the second sort of persecutions, through which the wicked, by means of false witnesses, not privately, but openly persecute the just, and gives pain a highly wrought account of the wickedness of such witnesses. He says, "they rose up." They did not wait to be summoned, they volunteered, accusing me of things "I knew not;" things I not only did not do, but even did not think off. For, we are said to "know not" what we do not approve, nor never did, as if we did not know how to do them. Thus, the apostle says of Christ, 2 Cor. 5, "him who knew no sin, he hath made sin for us." Then he says, "they have asked me," to show the forwardness and impudence of the said witnesses, who, not content with falsely accusing him before the judge, had the impudence to stand up and cross examine the accused themselves. Again, he says, "they repaid me evil for good." These false witnesses, so far from having been

injured by me, had been heaped with favors, and from pure malice thus culminated me. He finally adds, "to the depriving me of my soul;" to show that it was no trifling injury they sought to inflict on him, but the greatest of all injuries. "The depriving him of his soul," may have two meanings; first, by taking it as a general destruction and devastation, such as befell Job, who, in one day, lost his wealth, his children, his health; and even applies to the very destruction of his memory and of his name. It, secondly, may be taken as applying to one's character, which, by the devil's agency, or by that of his ministers, gets so damaged, that the just man is all but deprived of his soul.

13. "But as for me, when they were troublesome to me, I was clothed with haircloth. I humbled my soul with fasting and my prayer shall be turned into my bosom." Before he begins to speak of the third class of persecutions, he tells us how he dealt with the second, and says that he neither did evil for evil, nor thought of revenge, but betook himself in great humility to pray to God. "When they were troublesome to me." I have not proudly insulted them, but, clothed in sackcloth, I began to fast, to make my prayers more acceptable to God. Sackcloth and fasting are the wings of prayer. The king of the Ninevites, when he turned to prayer in fasting and sackcloth, was heard, Jonah 3. We read the same of King Achab, where the wise man says, "the prayer of him that humbled himself shall penetrate the clouds." And he adds, "and my prayer shall be turned into my bosom;" to show he had no doubt of his prayers producing the desired effect. Prayers put up such humility, will not come back to me in vain, but will fill my bosom with heavenly consolation.

14. "As a neighbor and as an own brother, so did I please: as one morning and sorrowful, so was I humbled." This verse is much more clearly expressed in the Hebrew, and the meaning of it is: in my affliction I not only abstained from doing evil for evil, but I even did good for evil, for I felt towards my enemies, as a friend would for his friend, as a brother for a brother, or rather as a mother for her ailing and languishing child. For, as a mother, when she sees her child ailing, in sorrow and sadness bends over it to raise it up, so did I in regard of my enemies. He could not give a more eloquent or a more touching account of his feelings to them. David actually carried out what he expresses here in the person of Christ, in his own person, and in that of all the perfect. He loved Saul as a brother, while he lived, and deplored him as a child when he died. Christ did the same in a higher degree, for, when he saw the city, he wept over it, and he compares his affection to that of the hen seeking to gather her little ones under her wings.

15. "But they rejoiced against me, and came together: scourges were gathered together upon me, and I knew not." He tells us now how his persecutors did evil for good, and at the same time passes on to the third sort of persecutions; for the wicked, not content with harassing the just, by frauds and calumnies, seek also to injure them by doing them personal harm. "But they rejoiced against me." I was grieving for their troubles, they were rejoicing at mine; and, not