

Psalms 143.^{1-2, 4, 6-9}

¹Hear my prayer, O LORD,
give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness
answer me, and in thy righteousness.
²And enter not into judgment with thy servant:
for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

⁴Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me;
my heart within me is desolate.
⁶I stretch forth my hands unto thee:
my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land.
⁷Hear me speedily, O LORD:
my spirit faileth:
hide not thy face from me,
lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.
⁸Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning;
for in thee do I trust:
cause me to know the way wherein I should walk;
for I lift up my soul unto thee...
⁹I flee unto thee to hide me.

In this reading, the 27th for Lent 2025, we return to the Penitential psalms, so appropriate to the season.

1. In requesting that God hear his plea, the Psalmist makes appeal to two of God's attributes.
 - ? What are those two attributes?
 - ? What is the significance of the Psalmist appealing to God's "faithfulness" and "righteousness" as he seeks to be heard?
 - ? What do you understand God's "faithfulness" and "righteousness" to be?
 - ? How do you feel about God's "faithfulness" if we define it as "fidelity"?
2. The Psalmist confesses that "in thy sight shall no man living be justified."
 - ? What does it mean to be "justified"?
 - ? What does it mean to you that no one can "be justified" or "thought right" in God's eyes?
 - ? How does this relate to the Psalmist's appeal to God's "faithfulness" and "righteousness" rather than his own?

Verse 2 and the sentiments it expresses became central to Paul doctrine of justification by faith. For example, in Romans 3, after quoting several passages from the Psalms, Paul concludes,

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law *there shall no flesh be justified in his sight*: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (verses 19-20).

- ? Why is it impossible for individuals to be viewed as innocent, right, and not-guilty in the sight of God through their individual spiritual efforts?

3. Because of his failure and sin the Psalmist confesses to feeling overwhelmed, desolate, thirsty (spiritually), and failing.
 - ? Can you relate to such feelings?
 - ? If so, what direction does the Psalmist provide in today’s reading that might lead to a release from such feelings?

4. The Psalmist pleads,

“Hide not thy face from me,
lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.”

- ? What does the Psalmist mean by “the pit”?

The “pit” can refer to the world of the dead in general, or to “hell” more narrowly. Some understand the Psalm to have been written by David and that David was in danger of going to hell for his murder. However, this reading of the text is dubious for a number of reasons and is, anyway, far too narrow. The fact is everyone is in danger of going to hell.

Consider Lehi and Nephi of Book of Mormon fame—pretty “good” people. Lehi prays,

“But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.”

His son, Nephi, prays,

“May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite!”

Elsewhere, Nephi speaks of “death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit” (2 Ne. 9.¹⁰). Moreover, Nephi speaks of “that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment” (2 Ne. 9.¹⁹).

It seems clear that “hell” is something more than the death of the body and an eternal grave. It is a torment to the spirit as well. Both men view hell as a very real, tormenting, ongoing, and eternal threat to their very being.

- ? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider that individuals such as Lehi and Nephi felt threatened by hell and gratitude for having been delivered from it?
- ? Have you ever felt so threatened?
- ? How do the words of the Psalmist in today’s reading, comfort you as you contemplate your sins and the threat they pose to your happiness and final destiny?