



Psalm 26 - Plea for Justice and Declaration of Righteousness

Of David.

Introduction

A variety of settings for Psalm 26 have been suggested, such as a prayer for public exoneration offered by someone seriously or falsely accused of wrongdoing; or perhaps part of an entrance liturgy by which pilgrims came into the sanctuary. There is scant evidence for any of these, though the latter is helpful because it links the theme with that of Psalms 15 and 24. That is, the psalm mirrors for those who attend worship what the ideal covenant participant should actually look like.

Some have taken the claims of innocence here as a kind of self-righteous boasting, but this is a mistake. First, the mention of God's steadfast love and faithfulness (v.3), a clear echo of Exodus 34:6, shows that divine grace is the foundation for holy living; similarly, the references to worship in God's house (vv.6-8) indicate that the covenantal means of grace, with their focus on atonement and forgiveness, are in view; and third, singing this psalm serves to enable worshippers more and more to like and embrace the ideal of faithful covenant membership, but it does not make achieving that ideal a precondition for true worship.

Psalm 26:1-3 - Prayer for Vindication

For God to vindicate the worshipper is for God to distinguish between the faithful and the impious; perhaps there is the additional nuance of showing the distinction publicly, as confirmed by 35:24 and 43:1. The faithful are those who take the covenant to heart, and who as a general pattern of life have walked in their integrity and have trusted in the Lord without wavering. They also keep God's steadfast love before their eyes and walk in God's faithfulness, i.e. they live by the grace revealed in Exodus 34:6.

- ¹ Vindicate me, O Lord,
for I have walked in my integrity,
and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.
- ² Prove me, O Lord, and try me;
test my heart and mind.
- ³ For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.

Psalm 26:1-3

Vindicate me, O Lord. Like many of David's psalms, this song was written from a time of great trouble. He here pleaded for God to vindicate him, presumably from his enemies, as he did on the occasion he could have killed King Saul but did not: *<<May the Lord therefore be judge, and give sentence between me and you. May he see to it, and plead my cause, and vindicate me against you>>* (1 Samuel 24:15). The request carries with it the implication that David himself was unable to vindicate himself, or had chosen not to.

For I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. David had confidence that God would answer his prayer and vindicate him, because he had faith in God that was demonstrated by a faithful life, i.e. I have walked in my integrity: *<<Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart>>* (Psalm 15:2), and: *<<The righteous walk in integrity – happy are the children who follow them!>>* (Proverbs 20:7). Therefore, despite his present difficulty, he could say he did so without wavering.

I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. David's statement is the core value of faith. Many have shown this same trust in God and been rewarded by his grace: *<<Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation>>* (Isaiah 12:2), *<<Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord>>* (Jeremiah 17:7), *<<Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God>>* (Daniel 3:28), and: *<<Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God>>* (1 Peter 1:21).

Prove me, O Lord, and try me. David was confident enough in his demonstrated life of faith that he asked God to examine and try him. If David were not in fact

trusting in God or walking rightly, he wanted God to show him and teach him. The request to examine, prove, and try refers mainly to the inward working of a man or woman, i.e. the mind and the heart.

For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you. David here again combined the ideas of trusting in God and his mercy, i.e. his steadfast love, and in his demonstrated life of faith, that is, I walk in faithfulness to you.

For your steadfast love is before my eyes. David knew the value of sustained examination and meditation upon the steadfast love of God:

- His steadfast love is a good subject.
- His steadfast love is a wide subject.
- His steadfast love is a pleasing subject.
- His steadfast love is a plain and simple subject.
- His steadfast love is an always suitable and seasonable subject.
- His steadfast love begins in eternity.
- His steadfast love is given freely to everyone.
- His steadfast love is certain.
- His steadfast love is faithful.
- His steadfast love goes into the smallest details.

I walk in faithfulness to you speaks of action, of manner of living. David knew the importance of both a right inward life, i.e. heart and mind, and right actions and deeds. It is the way that God judges people: <<*O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause*>> (Jeremiah 20:12); it is also the way he protects his own: <<*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*>> (Philippians 4:7).

Psalm 26:4-8 - Claim of Innocence

Here the psalm describes some of the features of the faithful covenant participant: he refuses to join with the unfaithful, the hypocrites, evildoers and the wicked, in their crooked schemes, because he renounces their values; and he aims to take part in public worship with moral innocence and with delight.

- ⁴ I do not sit with the worthless,
nor do I consort with hypocrites;
- ⁵ I hate the company of evildoers,
and will not sit with the wicked.

- 6 I wash my hands in innocence,
and go around your altar, O Lord,
7 singing aloud a song of thanksgiving,
and telling all your wondrous deeds.
8 O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell,
and the place where your glory abides.

Psalm 26:4-8

I do not sit with the worthless. Having stated the fact of his faithful life to God, David then described several specific ways that his life demonstrated a living faith. He did not associate with idolaters, hypocrites, evildoers, or the wicked. David did this under the assumption that at least some kind of association with these people was morally wrong. One might say that he took 1 Corinthians 15:33b to heart a thousand years before Paul wrote the words by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: <<*Bad company ruins good morals*>>.

And will not sit with the wicked. David had in mind the people he chose to associate with. People often have little or no control over many contacts and associations in life; but of those they do, they are obligated to choose and value with a heavenly perspective, not an earthly one. In the modern world this idea takes on an entirely different dimension, in many ways unknown to King David. People choose associations in their entertainment, and they often choose very poorly. They allow the wicked to amuse them, then to be their examples, then their models, and finally their idols. David's statement here applies to these kinds of contacts and associations.

CS Lewis once said, "Many people have a very strong desire to meet celebrated or 'important' people, including those whom they disapprove. But I am inclined to think a Christian would be wise to avoid, where he decently can, any meeting with people who are bullies, or lascivious, cruel, dishonest, spiteful and so forth. Not because we are 'too good' for them. In a sense we are not good enough. We are not good enough to cope with all the temptations, nor clever enough to cope with all the problems, which an evening spent in such society produces."

I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O Lord. David did not believe he was sinless or perfect. He did need to wash his hands, but he could do so in the innocence of a clear conscience before God. He availed himself of God's altar, both for atonement and for offerings of thanksgiving. Probably people wash or cleanse their hands more today than ever before in history. Perhaps every time they do so, they should remind themselves to receive the cleansing that comes

from Jesus and his work on the Cross, and their responsibility to cleanse their hands from wicked actions, their mouth from wicked words, and their heart from wicked desires. Outward cleanliness is good, but worth little for eternity if their life and heart is filthy before God. Jesus challenged the Jewish leaders on this very issue because they saw only tradition and not worship in their actions: <<***So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’ He said to them, ‘Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.” You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition’***>> (Mark 7:5-8).

I love the house in which you dwell. For David, a right walk with God was more than the avoidance of evil. It was also a simple yet deep love for God and his presence. He loved the tabernacle because it represented the house of God; **the place where** God’s **glory abides**: <<***When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple***>> (2 Chronicles 7:1). Obedience cannot be sustained without the sweetness of God’s presence and glory.

Psalm 26:9-10 - Separate from the Bloodthirsty

These verses amplify the prayer for vindication in v.1, namely, the desire to be treated differently from the unfaithful.

- ⁹ Do not sweep me away with sinners,
nor my life with the bloodthirsty,
¹⁰ those in whose hands are evil devices,
and whose right hands are full of bribes.

Psalm 26:9-10

Do not sweep me away with sinners. **Sweep me away** is often translated as **gather my soul**. In light of David’s great need and his great trust in God, he asked God to preserve his life. He refused to associate with the wicked in life; he asked God to not associate him with sinners in death.

Those in whose hands are evil devices. David knew of many wicked men with evil plots, who were greedy enough to take **bribes**; he considered it a curse to be associated with them either in the present age or in death. Many, who would never think of taking bribes from a businessman or person seeking advancement through another’s influence, still take bribes of a sort; they take bribes from sin. A bribe is simply a reward for doing something morally wrong. Sin may bribe an individual with momentary pleasure, attention, fame of a sort, excitement, comfort of life,

or whatever. They should never be willing to do something morally wrong because it is rewarded in some way: <<*Be careful that no one entices you by riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside*>> (Job 36:18 NIV), <<*Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them*>> (Isaiah 1:23), <<*In you, they take bribes to shed blood; you take both advance interest and accrued interest, and make gain of your neighbours by extortion; and you have forgotten me, says the Lord God*>> (Ezekiel 22:12), and: <<*Its rulers give judgement for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us'*>> (Micah 3:11).

Psalm 26:11-12 - Confidence and Commitment

The person who owns this ideal, who determines to walk in his integrity, may be sure of God's continuing care.

- ¹¹ But as for me, I walk in my integrity;
redeem me, and be gracious to me.
- ¹² My foot stands on level ground;
in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.

Psalm 26:11-12

But as for me, I walk in my integrity. David's confident proclamation is noted. Despite the danger to his life; despite the presence of the wicked, he, with God helping him, would walk in his integrity.

Redeem me, and be gracious to me. David had appropriate resolve; but even more appropriate trust in God. He could only walk in integrity if God would redeem him and be merciful to him. The same is true of those who trust in Jesus: <<*He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds*>> (Titus 2:14).

My foot stands on level ground. With this combination of appropriate resolve and trust in God, David, despite the dangers all around, could be confident of his position, i.e. my foot stands. He stood on level ground, in an even place, a repeat of his confidence in the first verse: <<*Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering*>>.

In the great congregation I will bless the Lord. David was so confident that he said that he would bless and praise God publicly among others, i.e. in the great congregation, not as an outcast or castaway.