

Psalm 43

I Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.

“Judge me” – the concept presented here is not that God pass judgment on him, but that God undertake his cause, act on his behalf and do justice in his case. In other words, the Psalmist is asking that God plead his case and vindicate him. This same notion is found at Psalm 26:1: **Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord, therefore I shall not slide.**

“Plead my cause” – this language is consistent with and supportive of the explanation just given. Lawyers plead the causes of their clients. That process involves intelligent attention being given to relevant and material facts, organizing them in a cogent fashion so that they can be presented concisely and effectively, and then merging that factual presentation with the applicable legal principles, all wrapped up with a bow so that it sounds good and persuasive to the decision-maker.

Now, some lawyers are better than others, and some shy away from that aspect of the work that involves pleading causes, choosing rather to stay away from the courtroom for the most part. But, nobody could honestly say there is any human that would come close to the pleading skills of our Savior. Concisely stated, David is asking God to be his lawyer/advocate in the dispute presented by this verse.

Here’s how Spurgeon describes the advocacy powers of God: *One good word from God outweighs ten thousand railing speeches of men. He bears a brazen shield before him whose reliance in all things is upon his God; the arrows of calumny fall harmlessly from such a buckler. *** His wisdom can outwit the craft of the vilest serpent, and his power can overmatch the most raging lion.*

“Ungodly nation” – we have here arrived at our comfort zone. Often this pulpit speaks to the wretched condition of America. Consider this writing of George E. Sokolsky writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*:

When the morals of man are considered we are halted by the astonishing retreat of the 20th century with its excess of divorces, its broken homes, its emphasis on homosexuality, its acceptance of materialistic Marxism in wide areas that were so recently Christian, its avoidance of faith, honor, dignity, sacrifice.

Pop quiz time: When do you think those words were written about this country we are living in? You likely will be shocked at the answer: **1951**, in reaction to a scandal involving West Point cadets (students) that resulted in about 100 being expelled from that military school, including all but two members of their national champion football team. That was two years before I was born!

So, what do we say? Well, matters have worsened at such a rapid pace that Mr. Sokolsky would not recognize this “ungodly nation” and doubtless would never have dreamed where it was heading. And more importantly, what is our job as part of this pleading against such a nation and, indeed, the world? **Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.** (Isaiah 58:1). While this language has primary application to the Jews, it also surely includes the Gentile world given that we are living in the New Testament era.

To expound: Cry out full-throated. No faint whispers or stammering lips. Full strength of voice, as best we can. No smooth things. A trumpet is loud and piercing. Speak loud and distinct, so that the language of reproof may be heard. Get their attention. In our circumstances, this task is satisfied by this: **Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.** (Habakkuk 2:2). Consider this verse in Revelation chapter 1 against that backdrop, where Christ says: **Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.** (Revelation 1:19).

Ellicott on Habakkuk 2:2: *the prophecy is to be inscribed plainly and legibly, so that the reader may “run his eye” quickly through it.* The writing must be such that it may be read with ease. Write in legible characters. Barnes adds: *in large lasting characters, that he may run that readeth it, that it may be plain to any, however occupied or in haste.* So Isaiah too was commanded to write the four words, “haste-prey-speed-spoil.” Make it plain; keep it simple. Poole: *That he may run that readeth it; that none may need to make a stop, but hold on his course; in the greatest haste of business, every one may plainly and clearly discern what is written.* Finally, and this may be of particular interest to those engaged in the sign-making activities, if you want to get a good feel of all the tedious details of getting this work done in Habakkuk’s day, read Gill’s commentary on this verse; I won’t weigh you down with that bit of knowledge just now.

Deliverance “from the deceitful and unjust man” wraps this verse up. The primary application is likely an enemy on the scene at that time, such as Absalom or Ahithophel. **And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.** (2 Samuel 15:31).

But there is also a generic application of these words, as there has always been and there will always be, humans that are deceitful and unjust, and you don’t have to look very far to find them. *Deceit and injustice are boon companions: he who fawns will not fear to slander. From two such devils none can deliver us but God. His wisdom can outwit the craft of the vilest serpent, and his power can overmatch the most raging lion.* (Spurgeon). **And with many other words did he (Peter) testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward (perverse) generation.** (Acts 2:40). Work daily to avoid the perils of interacting with those who would destroy your soul.

²For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

Why do you cast me off as a loathsome and disgusting object? The phrase “cast off” signifies foul, rancid, to stink, abominable. Kramer: “Look away, I’m hideous.” **I will spew thee out of my mouth.** (Revelation 3:16). **Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him.** (Hosea 8:3).

David is asking in a state of unbelief, that is to say, he can’t believe what is happening to him. He was ready to conclude that he was cast off and rejected of God. But, as Gill so accurately reminds us, no matter how it may seem at a particular moment or circumstance, *God does not cast off or reject any of his people; they always continue in his love, and in his covenant, and in the hands of his Son; they are always in his sight and family, and shall never perish eternally; and whoever casts them off, or casts them out, he will not[.]*

³O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Light and truth! What guides in this world of shadow and lies. These potent aids to God’s children have been around from the beginning; they have been and are the escort of all faithful souls in all ages. **And he put the breastplate upon him: also he put in the breastplate the Urim (lights) and Thummim (truth).** (Leviticus 8:8). **And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of**

the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim. (Nehemiah 7:65).

Now please notice this verse merges light and truth with the Lord's church. That place, and only that place, is where God will provide this essential and desperately-needed assistance to his people. You are not going to find this light and truth with human government, politicians, judges, teachers, professors, movie stars, medical doctors, business leaders, and so on.

The referenced "holy hill" is Mount Zion, the place of God's presence and worship. The "tabernacles", plural, are likely a reference to the two tabernacles present under the first covenant, since superseded by Christ, the "perfect tabernacle", as we read of in Hebrews Chapter 9:

1Then verily the first *covenant* had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

2For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein *was* the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.

3And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;

4Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein *was* the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;

5And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

6Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service *of God*.

7But into the second *went* the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and *for* the errors of the people:

8The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:

9Which *was* a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

10Which *stood* only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed *on them* until the time of reformation.

11But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

12Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*.

⁴Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.

There are those who say this Psalm (43) is actually just an extension, part and parcel, of Psalm 42. You might recall when we looked at Psalm 42 it contained a theme of David being removed from the church and public worship, and his longing for a return. The opening clause of this verse closes that theme. *The meaning is, that he would again unite with others in the public and customary worship of God.* (Barnes). The “altar of God” here mentioned is Mt. Zion, the chief place of worship. *If David might but be favoured with such a deliverance as would permit his return, it would not be his own house of heritage which would be his first resort, but to the altar of God his willing feet should conduct him. His whole heart would go as a sacrifice to the altar, he himself counting it his greatest happiness to be permitted to lie as a burnt offering wholly dedicated to the Lord.* (Spurgeon). If God is not your joy, you don’t have real joy!

Next we see David’s expectation that his praise of God, upon returning to the house of God, would feature harp-playing. There is no substitute for music in the worship of our God. And remember, David was an accomplished harpist. When King Saul sought a man **who (was) a cunning player on an harp** (1 Samuel 16:16), one of his servants answered: **Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing (a harp), and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.** (1 Samuel 16:18). Before that tale was told, **David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.** (1 Samuel 16:23). I say to one and all, if your life’s circumstances permit it, learn an instrument and play it as part of your quiet praise of the Almighty Creator. **And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.** (Revelation 5:8).

Finally, the last portion of this verse has this interesting turn of a phrase “O God, my God.” That is to say, David worships God not only as the God of providence and universal governance, but in the capacity as his personal, well-known God. *It was not merely God as such that he desired to worship, or to whom he now appealed, but God as his God, the God to whom he had devoted himself, and whom he regarded as his God even in affliction and trouble.* (Barnes).

⁵Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

As earlier mentioned, this Psalm is often considered to be an extension of Psalm 42; that this verse 5 appears in essentially the same form twice in Psalm 42 is further evidence supporting that belief. (See Psalm 42:5, 11 and my last sermon that dealt with Psalm 42, including those two verses).

The sameness of these verses proves that Psalm 43 was penned by the same writer as Psalm 42, and generally deals with the same subject. A doctrine which is consistent through both of these Psalms is that we should not be dejected or cast down in the troubles of life but should place hope in God and anticipate better times, both in this world and that to come. *He who has an eternity of blessedness before him - he who is to dwell forever in a world of peace and joy - he who is soon to enter an abode where there will be no sin, no sadness, no tears, no death - he who is to commence a career of glory which is never to terminate and never to change - should not be cast down - should not be overwhelmed with sorrow.* (Barnes).

*****HARD BREAK*****

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Peter 4:18).

This speaks to the difficulty with which the child of God gets to heaven, through this dangerous and ensnaring world. They escape destruction with the utmost difficulty, so the word rendered "scarcely" signifies. The same word appears elsewhere, such as Acts 14:18: **And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.** In other words, with strong and emotive pleas, Paul and Barnabas were just barely able to hold the people back from mobbing. They just barely got out alive. Lesson to be learned: The elect's peril arises from all sorts and types of circumstances in this life.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (1 Corinthians 3:15). *"The righteous" man has always more or less of trial, but the issue is certain, and the entrance into the kingdom abundant at last. The "scarcely" marks the severity of the ordeal, and the unlikelihood (in a mere human point of view) of the righteous sustaining it; but the righteousness of Christ and God's everlasting covenant make it all sure.* (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown). We must **through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.** (Acts 14:22). This is reality!

There will be hard encounters along the way. Using language from the context of this verse, the **[e]lect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father** (1 Peter 1:2) face **the fiery trial which is to try you** (1 Peter 4:12) and will **be reproached for the name of Christ** (1 Peter 4:14). *Doubtless, when the best of us looks back, in the light of the last day, upon all that he has been through, he will be amazed that he ever could be saved at all.* (Ellicott).

But, you ask, what about when Jesus said **my yoke is easy, and my burden is light?** (Matthew 11:30). It's all relative *vis-à-vis* what the ungodly and sinner face.

He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30).

*Thus John speaks of Christ's increase and his own decrease, not only as what was necessary and unavoidable, and that which could not be prevented, and therefore must be borne; but as highly just and agreeable to him: and he is entirely satisfied with it, nay, and rejoices in it. * * * [L]et us especially rejoice to observe the glory of Christ increasing, and eclipsing the lustre of all other glory, as the increasing light of the morning causes the glory of the morning star to decline, and at last entirely to disappear. And, if our diminution and abasement may but in the least contribute to the advancement of his name*

and honour, let us cheerfully submit to it, and be content to be any thing, yea, to be nothing, so that Christ may be all. (Benson).

This, my friends, is not about us! This is about our Savior, Jesus, and he is, has been and will be, increasing. His kingdom is rising and spreading as we speak and will ultimately extend throughout the world and the universe. He must shine more and more each day. God's stature must increase, *and will more and more in the latter day, when he, and he alone, shall be exalted: and he must increase in the ministry of his word, which was published by him, and his disciples, throughout all the cities of Israel; and which, after his resurrection and ascension, grew and increased mightily, notwithstanding the opposition made unto it both by their civil and ecclesiastical rulers; and which, by the means of his apostles, was spread throughout the Gentile world, and will hereafter cover the earth, as the waters do the sea: and also in his kingdom and interest, which at first were very small, like a grain of mustard seed, or like a little stone cut out of the mountain without hands; but in process of time grew exceedingly, and will, ere long, till the face of the whole earth; for the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth; and of the increase of it there shall be no end. (Gill).*

Get a solid hold on this second theme, and the first theme will fall into place much better. Your challenging journey and pathway will improve once you get your arms around the reality that this is all about God and we are nothing and nobodies in the big scheme of things. The difficulties we face will seem trivial and non-threatening when we rightly perceive our role in this amazing process or trip.