

Get Out of Jail Free

Psalm 142:1 *A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.*

With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.

² I pour out **my complaint** before him; I tell my trouble before him.

³ When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.

⁴ Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul.

⁵ I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are **my refuge**, my portion in the land of the living."

⁶ Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! **Deliver** me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!

⁷ **Bring me out of prison**, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.

Psalm 143:1 *A Psalm of David.*

Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!

² Enter not into **judgment** with your servant, **for no one living is righteous before you**.

³ For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has **made me sit in darkness** like those long dead.

⁴ Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.

⁵ **I remember** the days of old; **I meditate** on all that you have done; **I ponder** the work of your hands.

⁶ **I stretch out my hands** to you; **my soul thirsts** for you like a parched land. Selah

⁷ Answer me quickly, O LORD! My spirit fails! Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit.

⁸ Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

⁹ Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to you for refuge.

¹⁰ Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!

¹¹ For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!

¹² And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies, and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am your servant.

Psalms 142-143

Prisoners of War

THE MATRIX TRILOGY is set several centuries in our future. The premise is that there was a long-standing global conflict sometime in the 22nd century, a battle between humanity and machines that had become self-aware. Over time, this “**Machine War**” saw the robots gain the upper hand where they eventually took dominance on earth by rounding up the vast majority of humanity, placing them all in skyscraper-like power plants, and hooking them up to simulated virtual reality in the Matrix. This Matrix holds the minds of all these humans prisoner, as it makes them

think they are free and living normal lives when in fact they are in fact asleep, plugged into cables, and living in womb-like pods until such a time as the robots decide to terminate you.

The Matrix is the perfect post-modern trilogy: It borrows heavily from Christianity, but also Buddhism, Platonism, and other “isms” to tell its story; it blurs the lines between fantasy and reality; it is pure story-telling (postmodernism is all about “the story”), but with amazing action and special effects. It’s lead female character “Trinity” and other Christian images can lull you to sleep making you think you are watching a Christian parable, when in fact it is heavily laced with Gnosticism.¹ Like I said, all very postmodern.

But *The Matrix* does something related to our purposes here. It teaches a generation of movie-goers that there is **an unseen reality that keeps humanity slaves to itself** and we don’t even know it. We walk around thinking and acting like we are free, when in fact we are anything but. The movie sees this slavery as something akin to Plato’s *Cave* allegory, where the people have been chained together and

¹ See the *SparksNotes*, “The Matrix Trilogy,” <http://www.sparknotes.com/film/matrix/section3/> or *Hollywood Decoded* with Jay Dyer and Jay Weidner “S1:Ep1--The Wachowskis’ Matrix Trilogy,” (Aug 21, 2017), *GaiaTV*.

left staring at a wall of shadows their entire lives. They have no idea the reality that lies just behind them. They are ignorant and uneducated and need to come into the light.



Neo awakenings from the Matrix



People leaving Plato's Cave

The Bible sees a similar problem of slavery. Those under this slavery also lack knowledge, but not knowledge *of the problem*—as in *The Cave* or *The Matrix*. No, people know that perfectly well. They just choose to suppress this truth (Rom 1). Rather, they lack the knowledge *of the solution* to the problem. They need to be told this solution, and through it, God sets people, who in many ways didn't even know they were slaves, free.

As Christians, we commonly refer to being under slavery in three distinct yet related ways. We are slaves to **sin**, **death**, and the **devil**. **Sin**: “**We ourselves were once foolish,**

disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another” (Tit 3:3). “Whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved” (2Pe 2:19). “Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). And (importantly for our study this morning) in Romans is says, “You ... were once slaves of sin” (Rom 6:17).

Death: “All [our] lives [we] were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:15). And again in Romans, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Rom 6:16).

The Devil: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who ... were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb 2:14-15). “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless stoicheia, whose slaves you want to be once

more?” (Gal 4:9).² And again in Romans, the Apostle clearly says, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20).

All three are found in Genesis 3. The allusion we just saw in Romans was of a war that was predicted in Genesis 3:15 between his seed and the seed of the woman. This came because our first parents sinned at the temptation by the devil. And the result of it was death.

As slaves, you are not able to escape these things. Whether you know it or not, believe it or not, they are the three things that truly do enslave every man, woman, and child on this earth. Everyone is a sinner. Everyone has broken and breaks God’s laws. Even as one of our Psalms says today, “No one living is righteous before you” (Ps 143:2). Everyone dies. “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). And everyone has been given over to Satan who is the “prince of this world” (John 12:31) and is the one that all the sons of disobedience follow who

² The *Stoicheia* are *Stoicheia* can refer to the basic elements of nature such as earth, water, air, and fire. Or they are personal spiritual beings like demons, angels, or star deities (Acts 7:42–43). Hence, the word is translated as anything from “elemental things” (NAS) or “principles” (ESV), to “elemental spirits” (RSV, CJB). See the sermon on Sons of God: Knowing Your Identity in Christ (Galatians 3:21–4:11).

are by nature objects of wrath (**Eph 2:1-2**). This is simply unavoidable.

But the Scripture tells us **good news**. We heard this hinted at in the Satan being crushed passage above. This is the news I want to give you today from two Psalms that continue a movement of **violence** against a righteous man (**Ps 140**) to **execution** of his righteous friends (**141**) and now to the **imprisonment** of the righteous left standing (**142**) to the **panic** that ensues because of it (**143**). Once the Psalmist is aware of the true wickedness around him and the condition he has been put into (imprisonment), the state of mind this in turn creates in him is indescribable. Thankfully, he has not altogether lost his mind and he has in fact received the gospel that he remembers as he prays his way through the panic.

In this, we see the chief doctrine that turned the world upside down 500 years ago and that, if believed again today, could by the grace of God, do the very same in our generation of people given over to these three terrible foes that everyone ignores, tries to escape, or pretend don't exist. As I was first reflecting on this relationship between imprison-

ment and being set free in Psalms 142-143, my mind immediately thought of “faith alone.” As I began to study the passage, I discovered that I was not alone. In fact, the Apostle Paul—especially in Romans (and Galatians) uses Psalm 143 as the OT diving off point for his doctrine of justification. So with that, let us hear what the wise Psalmist has to teach us.

Psalm 142: Imprisonment

Psalm 142 is *a maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer*. We first saw “maskil” in Psalm 32 and learned that it means “wisdom” or “instruction.” Thus, the Targum here renders it, “Good insight” and the LXX, “A Psalm of instruction.” You are to learn from it something important. It isn’t just a one-to-one “*David-was-being-chased-by-enemies-and-that’s-the-only-way-it-can-apply-to-me*” thing. The events that God brought into his life were given *to teach you something* very important about yours, whether you have need for physical deliverance or ... something different.

His prayer **begins with his voice** (remember Ps 140-141 and the tongue of the serpent and David’s own wicked

tongue that he then begins to use to the glory of God rather than for his own sin). “With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD” (Ps 142:1). He’s crying and he needs mercy. Something is terribly wrong.

What is it? He has a complaint and he is taking it to the throne of heaven. “I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him” (2). Some people think you should never offer up a prayer of complaint to God! “How dare anyone speak like this to the God of the universe.” But that is to treat God like someone who doesn’t care or isn’t big enough to handle it. It is profoundly anti-biblical.

What is the complaint? “When my spirit faints with me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me” (3). We’ve seen the “trap” in the two previous songs as well, so the links to these songs are obvious and make it clear that they form a unit of thought, at least in the mind of the scribe who compiled them into the book of Psalms. Curiously, in the structure of this psalm, this forms the center of the first of two chiasms:

- A. I cry (142:1-2)
- B. Spirit overwhelmed (3a)
- C. My Path (3b)
- D. A Snare/Trap (3c)
- C¹. My right-side (4a)
- B¹. No one cares for my soul (4b)
- A¹. I have cried (5a)

The NT speaks of traps in a *spiritual* way. For instance, the Apostle says this about some who abandoned him—he hopes that, “They may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2Ti 2:26). Do you hear the echo of slavery to Satan here combined with the trap? Sin is considered a “trap” of the devil (see also 1Tim 3:7). So whether or not you have actual enemies who are plotting your physical harm like David, you can certainly relate to this application of The Great Enemy. You seek to walk in ways that are right, and suddenly, the trap is sprung, temptation explodes around you, and the pitfalls seem almost impossible to escape. How much worse for those who are still slaves to Satan?

With David’s actual enemies, this left him feeling utterly alone. “Look to the right and see: there is none who takes

notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul” (Ps 142:4). David himself now moves away from the bodily danger to the spiritual danger that is on the inside—his soul. It isn’t just the physical that is so frightening. No wonder the Apostle speaks of spiritual danger too. David takes this desperate loneliness to the LORD in prayer. This is, ironically, the best way to end that depression caused by feelings of isolation and abandonment. Friends can always abandon you; but Jesus Christ will never leave or forsake you (Heb 13:5).³

In fact, as we saw last week (Ps 141:8), this has to be a verse about Christ, for the Psalmist sings about there being no refuge remaining for him. All others have been stripped away. He is left naked and alone in this world by the attacks and traps that seek him out. So what does he do? “I cry to

³ **Going Deeper:** The book of Joshua begins, “After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant...” (Josh 1:1). So, the one speaking to Joshua is called Yahweh. What he Yahweh tell Joshua? Among other things, “...I will not leave you or forsake you” (Josh 1:5). *Enter Hebrews.* The Preacher says, “Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb 13:5). Who is the “he” who said this? Obviously, it is Yahweh from Josh 1:1, 5. In the immediate context of Hebrews, the nearest antecedent is “God” from vs. 4. But immediately after this verse it says, “The Lord is my helper” (vs. 7). This is a quote from Ps 118:6 where the Hebrew is Yahweh. Hebrews then sums up all these uses of “God” and “Lord” by saying, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (8). In other words, it appears quite strongly that for the Apostle,

you, O LORD...” (5). Crying to the LORD is the center of a second chiasm in the song.

A. No one acknowledges me (142:4a)

B. Refuge has failed me, not one cares for my soul (4b)

C. I have cried to the LORD (5a)

B¹. The LORD my refuge/brings my soul out of prison (5b-7a)

A¹. The righteous surround me (7b)

This is important, because it helps us see what happens when he cries out. “I say, You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living” (5). He has no refuge, so he makes God his refuge! More. Of all the things David had (and as king, he had a lot), the only portion he wants is the LORD himself. According to puritans like Thomas Boston and Richard Steele, this refers to Christ.⁴ “God in Christ [is] the believer’s portion.”⁵ “Not Christ the Saviour or Refuge only, so most

⁴ **Going Deeper:** As we will see, while they suggest it refers to the believer’s trust in Christ, earlier Fathers like Jerome actually saw it as the very words of Christ to his Father. “Without doubt, the psalm also applies to the Lord, the true David ... As David went into the cave to hide himself from Saul, the Lord came into this world and suffered persecution” (Jerome, *Breviarium in Psalmos* 141.1). “If we apply this psalm to the Lord, in v. 5 we hear the Lord himself speak: All of my disciples have abandoned me and fled” (ibid., 141, 5). In *The Navarre Bible: The Psalms and the Song of Solomon Texts and Commentaries* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 456-57.

⁵ **Thomas Boston**, *The Whole Works of Thomas Boston: A Soliloquy on the Art of Man-Fishing*, ed. Samuel M’Millan, vol. 5 (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1849), v.

would be willing; but Christ the Prince and *Portion also in the land of the living*. So *David* could say, *Psal. 142.5. O Lord, I said thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living*. How many would fain have the Lord Jesus Christ for their *Refuge*, when Conscience pinches, affliction presses, or death stares them in the face, but how few will choose him for their portion and happiness in the midst of their outward comforts?”⁶

Spurgeon puts the matter frankly, “1. God is infinite in mercy. 2. God is infallible in wisdom. 3. God is boundless in power. 4. God is omniscient and omnipresent. 5. God is a Being whose love never changes. 6. God is an independent Being, and the Governor and Director of all things.”⁷ So why wouldn’t a person make this their portion? After all, “God has given himself to the saints, in the covenant of grace, to be their God, and has promised that they shall be his people.”⁸ So trusting in Christ as your refuge and portion

⁶ **Richard Steele** (1629-1692), *A Plain Discourse upon Uprightness Shewing the Properties and Priviledges of an Upright Man / by Richard Steele*, Early English Books Online (London: Printed for E. Calvert, and are to be sold by John Williamson .., 1672), 15–16.

⁷ C. H. **Spurgeon**, *The Treasury of Yahweh* who spoke these things in the OT is both God and Jesus Christ. *David: Psalms 120-150*, vol. 6 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 333.

⁸ *Ibid.*

is nothing but taking hold of the promises of God who has come in covenant love to his people.

As he does this, David cries out, “Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from the persecutors, for they are too strong for me! Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!” (5-7a). It is at this point that we finally see David in prison. Now, the psalm refers to being in a cave, probably hiding from Saul. That is a kind of prison. But as a psalm of instruction and wisdom, you need to consider the spiritual prisons that a person either is still in or has been freed from, depending on if they have prayed this kind of prayer with David or not.

Consider the essence of what this prayer is full of in the next song (both have the same deeply rooted hope), for it really speaks about the way you get out of these spiritual jails. But before leaving his song, notice that it ends on the triumphant note, “The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me” (7). These words of hope are really the words of faith in Christ, for what other thing can account for such words while he is still in his prison? And if they are words of faith, then what does it say about this cry

of his heart in the midst of his loneliness, abandonment, and danger to both his body and his soul?

Psalm 143: Panic. Yet Faith

If these songs really do have us see some kind of progression in a life-experience of disaster of David, then the panic shown in Psalm 143 is meant to be read with 140-142. But **in its panic**, we **also** have **something truly precious**. And as the Apostle uses it, it becomes a diagnostic of what true faith looks like.

This “*Psalm of David*” begins, “**Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy!**” (Ps 143:1a). We can hear in these words something akin to what we’ve been reading. And in the context of these psalms together, we already know the problem. Vipers have killed his righteous friends and have imprisoned David who is now very low in countenance and desperate for **both physical and spiritual freedom**.

Immediately, David’s faith asserts itself. “**In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!**” (143:1b). The prayer of faith that cries out to God in times like these firsts

rests upon the attributes of God, like Spurgeon said earlier. In this case, it is his moral and covenantal attributes of being faithful and righteous to the people he has of his own prerogative and good will entered into a relationship of grace with.

Importantly, Paul uses these words in Romans 3. He speaks of “the faithfulness of God” (Rom 3:3) and “the righteousness of God” (3:21). This is an important thing to see because in Romans 3:21 (and Galatians 2:16), the Apostle, *talking about justification by faith in Christ*, cites this verse.⁹ In other words, Paul sees in this psalm tremendous OT foundations for this beloved doctrine.

David needs this grace, because as we saw in Psalm 141, he is a sinner. This comes out again here, and it is **one of the three things** we are enslaved to. In fact, one of the great verses of total depravity in the Scripture is found next. “Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you” (Ps 143:2).¹⁰ But instead of focusing

⁹ See the discussions in **Moisés Silva**, “Galatians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 788–791 and **Richard B. Hays**, “Psalm 143 and the Logic of Romans 3,” *JBL* 99.1 (Mar 1980): 107–115.

¹⁰ **Going Deeper.** The second part of this verse can be translated “In your site shall no man living be justified” (Goulder, Dahood, YLT, JPS, LXA, KJV, etc.). Dahood has, “But do not bring your servant into court, since no one alive can be justified before you.” The probable

on others when he declares that there is no one righteous before God, David looks inward at himself. “God, do not judge me, for I am not a righteous man, and if you judge me on my own merit, I would be doomed.”¹¹ Therefore, after trusting in God’s goodness, David’s prayer of faith confesses his own lack of it. These are the beginnings of the attributes that make up the absolute need for faith in Christ. And this, in turn, begins to teach you how to be freed from that prison.

But these are **only the beginnings**. From here, the Psalmist seems to focus on what appears to be outcome of his own unrighteousness coming out at the present time—a thought here, a bad word there, or whatever. In other words, he is

courtroom metaphor is certainly the appropriate place for “justification” language, as the idea is to be “declared righteous” by a judge. Given that David has not said anything directly about justification through faith and is talking only about his own evil actions here, this is an acceptable translation. Even more, it is the way Paul seems to take it in Romans 3:19 (see n. 13 below). Nevertheless, David does in fact plead with God to answer him in “**righteousness**” (vs. 1, 11). So something has to give. Either David is in fact righteous (which he isn’t), or God can somehow justify him even though his is unrighteous. The rest of the Psalm demonstrates that it is the latter, and therefore, the ESV’s translation as being a kind of emphasis on his own sin as he confesses it to God is more appropriate.

¹¹ Silva (p. 791) explains, “**he is cognizant of his sin and acknowledges that the divine judge can only pronounce him guilty: “Do not bring your servant into judgment” (143:2). This plea suggests that in the next clause, “for no one living is righteous before you,” the psalmist is denying not the possibility of justification as such, but rather “the possibility of a man’s being justified on the basis of his deserts” (Cranfield 1975–1979: 1:197). Burton (1921: 124) goes so far as to argue that the first part of the verse gives to the second part this meaning: “No man can be justified if judged on a basis of merit, all grace and mercy on God’s part being excluded” (bold added).**

not finished praying to God about his own depravity. “For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead” (3). This continues to remind us of the cave he was in in the previous song. What would such an enemy hounding you, pursuing you, cornering you bring out of your own heart and actions? And do you consider that this is a question you very much *can* answer, given that you have such an enemy in sin, death, and the devil? How do you respond to them?

For many people, the answer is that if it is a spiritual enemy, they simply want to avoid being confronted with it and thinking about it. So, they either **directly deny these enemies exist**: “I don’t remember the last time I sinned;” “I’m young and will live forever;” “Satan is a fable invented by religious power-mongers hell-bent on controlling the sheeple;” etc.; or they **spend their time running as far away from the thoughts as possible**. What a terrible reaction this is, and strange, given that if it is a physical enemy, we very much do *not* do these things. Imagine if you were David and someone was literally hunting you to kill you. No one would deny that reality, nor would they ignore it. Why

then do we do this with spiritual truth? It is because we either don't know or don't want the gospel.

It is our nature either to hide and become depressed or to fight and lash out. People can do it with the Gospel. David did it with his enemy. In fact, he seems to respond in both ways. “Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.” The first is **panic**; the second is **anger**. He realizes neither is a good reaction and both can have terrible consequences. Have you ever wondered how the David who was in such a cave when Saul came in was able to control himself and neither become an absolute basket case or kill Saul before he killed him? He had his chances you know.

The answer is part of this prayer of faith. In admitting the specific ways that he is not thinking righteously, he takes them to God in a prayer of confession. **Then, he meditates**. What does he begin to think about? Not his enemy, but his God. “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands” (5). He may be thinking about previous times in his own life where God rescued him, and that could have been many occasions for this man. Or, he could just as easily be thinking about stories

he read about in Scripture about times when God had been faithful and righteous towards Israel. One thinks of the Exodus as the example *par excellence*. Either way, he is the same God. Either way, the point is that **this is my God, and if he did it before, he can do it again**. This has a way of changing horrible thoughts into good thoughts. This is one of the main purposes of prayer, and it is through the very act that God immediately begins to work! But again, this presupposes faith.

We begin to see sharper, clearer signs of his faith. “**I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. *Selah*.**” In the structure of the song, like the previous, this one has two chiasms, and “hands” becomes the central point of the first.

- A. The enemy (143:3)
 - B. My spirit (4)
 - C. Your hands (5)**
 - C¹. My hands (6)**
 - B¹. My spirit (7-8)**
 - A¹. My enemies (9)**

While he ponders the work of God's hands (5), he lifts up his own hands (6). This is **an act of worship**. It is not worship because he has no choice; it is worship because he trusts in this God. But he isn't in the temple. Things are not pleasant. It is an act of faith while sitting there in the darkness of a cold, damp prison-cave. That cold dark damp is (perhaps, if read with Ps 142) contrasted with the **parched and thirsty soul and land**. Both are images of distress, of need, of trouble, of potential death. And the only hope is **the living water** that comes from Christ. There are good reasons then to pause here (*selah*).

Do the prisons in your life bring you to the end of yourself and to trust Christ in this kind of prayer in the silence of your disaster? The answer to this, beloved, is a sign of whether you are saved or not.

But faith is confidence in things you can't see, and because of this, **doubts** creep in. So, the appeal goes to the heavenly court,¹² **“Answer me quickly, O LORD! My spirit fails! Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit”** (7). **The second of the three slave-mas-**

¹² See note 10 above.

ters comes into view (see also 142:5): **Death**. He is still living, and if he is living, there is hope. But if God will not answer him, he might as well just die here and now. Do you see how faith gambles the whole pile of chips that God can and will free him? It's all or nothing. If this God doesn't hear and doesn't answer prayer, then there is no point in believing in him. If he does though...

“Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul” (8). Now David's faith becomes explicit. He trusts in God. He trusts in the midst of these doubts. The enemy around and about him has caused his very spirit to fail, but it is much worse if God should hide his face. So he prays to live through the night, so that in the morning he can know the renewal of God's steadfast love.

But it isn't just making it through the night. It is knowing what to do in the midst of the dark night of his soul. “**Make me know the way I should go.**” Faith is never an abandonment of good works; it is a re-entrenchment in them. All the more when he isn't quite sure how to handle it. God must teach him the way that is right. This is language that is reminiscent of **Psalm 119**.

The **refuge** theme returns, this time in the context of deliverance. “**Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to you for refuge**” (9). While David’s immediate enemy was Saul, his other enemy in this song has been himself. There is the physical enemy and the spiritual or supernatural enemy of sin and Satan. Hence, our Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, “**Deliver us from evil**” (**Matt 6:13**). Deliverance fits right along with the slavery or prison themes we have seen. Due to its position in the sentence (as substantival adjective), the word “evil” can be taken as physical or spiritual evil, as in “the Evil One.” David needs deliverance; you need it too.

For some of you, it is **a first-time deliverance**. You have never personally fled to Christ in prayer like this. You have never gone to him in confession of your sins or in baptism. You have not asked him to deliver you through Christ. You need to do this now, while you are hearing of the spiritual danger around you, even before you leave here today, so that you do not waste the time and become even more hardened to these things. You need to be freed from the truest prisons that so many deny and avoid. Best of all, you can get out of them free. There is no cost to you.

The rest of you, like David, need ongoing deliverance from the fear of death, the temptations of the devil, and the destruction of sin. Perhaps you need to be more awakened to the dangers that attend them, the dangers to your actions and your own spirit. Perhaps you need to realize anew that these dangers continue to present themselves like Saul ever hunting his prey. You too need to be praying like David in this song, if for no other reason than it strengthens the faith you have been granted.

Who do you pray to? Yahweh. Deliver me Yahweh. Father God. Who do you pray to? The Yahweh the Refuge. Jesus Christ, the one who takes your prayers before the heavenly throne and makes them acceptable and answerable.

But curiously, these two are not the center of this song. That distinction belongs to the Third Person. How will God do these things? This is where the second chiasm of the song teaches us. For its center is vs. 10. “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”

- A. Your lovingkindness (143:8)
 - B. My soul (8)
 - C. Deliver me Yahweh (9)
 - D. Teach me by your Spirit (10)**
 - C¹. Quicken me Yahweh (11)
 - B¹. My soul (11b)
 - A¹. Your Mercy (12)

The Psalmist continues thinking about being obedient to God as a man of faith. “To do God’s will” is to obey God’s law. But it is only as he is taught by the Holy Spirit that his feet will be put on level ground. All other ground a slippery rock, a treacherous climb, or sinking sand. It is through the Holy Spirit that God sets your feet on the level ground.

Notice that this was said *in the OT*! It isn’t that the Holy Spirit was inactive in the OT or that he only came to earth in at Pentecost. No. He has always been here, always accompanying the Son of God in his works for his people. David knows the Spirit can help him, because he has helped him in the past: “**Take not your Holy Spirit from me**” (Ps 51:11). David knows the Spirit sees and knows everything about him: “**Where can I flee from your Spirit**” (Ps 139:7). So now

the prayer is for the Spirit to lead him on through the darkness into the light of the gospel and Christ.

Christ? Yes, “**For your Name’s sake, O LORD, preserve my life!**” (Ps 143:11). The Name is Christ. Why would God preserve him? As he said at the beginning, “**Hear my prayer ... for mercy ... in your righteousness**” (11b). It is through Christ that God’s righteousness is made manifest to the world. The Apostle is all over this when he, immediately after quoting from our song, says, “**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested ... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe**” (Rom 3:21-22).¹³ Jesus fulfills this song!

There is one and **only one way for a sinner to be justified**, and that is through faith in the Just One, the one who lived a perfect life under the law and who died to both become your substitute and to destroy the works of the devil, to liberate the captives, to set people free from the power of sin, death, and the devil. And that is exactly what he did and what he is doing to this very moment, any time someone

¹³ The phrase in the Psalm is, “No one living is righteous before you” or better, “**no one alive can be justified before you**” (Ps 143:2). In Romans it becomes, “**No human being will be justified in his sight**” (Rom 3:19).

comes to him by faith alone, not trusting in their own righteousness, but in God's to fulfill his promises. This is the good news that you must hear, the news that sets you free. So now he says, “**In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble**” (Ps 143:11b). Is this your prayer today? Each day?

If so, then know that you are justified by grace through the deliverance that is found in Jesus Christ. Know that God will justify you on the Last Day because he has justified you this day. Know and be confident and turn all the more often to this God in prayers like this, prayers that free you from such prisons.

The last line of the song says, “**And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies, and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am your servant**” (12). In it, we have the last of our three slave-masters: the Devil. *Tsarar* (adversary) is sometimes translated as *diabolos* (Est 8:1). And since David speaks here about any adversary, and Satan is certainly the Adversary (1Pe 5:8), this conclusion fits exactly what we've been talking about this morning.

It is humility that receives the message that you are born a slave to these three things we've talked about today. It is faith that receives the message that you are set free by Jesus

Christ and that God cuts off the enemies of his people because he is both faithful and righteous. **Righteous** to punish sin in Christ so that you might have his righteousness counted to you. **Faithful** in that he promised to do these things to all who believe in the Name. Therefore, awake like Neo from the pod, come out of the cave you've been living in and see the Light that the God has told you about in Christ. See this entire reality for what it truly is, the good and the bad. Don't flee. Don't panic. Don't deny. Don't ignore. But go to the one who has the power of forgiveness, has triumphed over death, and has defeated the devil at the cross. And you may know for certain that God has heard your prayer.

Now is the time. As it says, “**We were held captive ... imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed ... the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe**” (**Gal 3:23, 22**).