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Compact Theology - Hymns for Psalm 28

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Compact Theology - Hymns for Psalm 28

Abstract

"What a gift to be blessed by the music and poetry of composers who have meditated on the psalms."

Posting about God's example of justice and mercy from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/compact-theology-hymns-for-psalm-28/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

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October 4,
2017

Leah Zuidema

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 28](#)

[Judges 16:23-31](#)

[Matthew 9:2-8](#)

I first learned about hymns as “compacted theology” from Richard Mouw. He has shared some [fine examples](#) of hymns that work as compacted theology, and he attributes the idea to one of his predecessors at Fuller Seminary, David Hubbard. For me, the lesson seems to have sunk in, because now I sometimes find myself looking to hymns as poetic commentaries on difficult Bible passages.

Psalm 28 is one of the psalms with which I need some help. On the surface, it’s a fairly simple psalm. A middle schooler would be able to handle most of the vocabulary, and the psalm is just 9 verses. But, it’s a tough one. The beginning and ending seem pretty straightforward. On either side, we have a picture of God as refuge: He is our rock, our strength, the shepherd who carries us forever.

The section with which I need help is in the middle, verses 3-5. Why is the psalmist in such danger that it is necessary for him to plead not to be dragged away with the wicked? Is the psalmist serious about praying that the wicked will be repaid with God’s wrath? Should I be praying this kind of prayer?

Here’s how this section of the psalm is set to music [in my church’s hymnal](#):

*I cry, O LORD, for help and mercy;
I lift my pleading hands in prayer.
LORD, do not drag me off with sinners
While wicked people stand and stare.*

*They act so friendly to their neighbors
But harbor malice in their heart.
LORD, punish them for spite and outrage,
And set their evil lives apart.*

*Because they disregard God’s doings,
And all his justice they despise,
Our LORD will cast them down in anger
And he will never let them rise.*

The line which catches my attention is the one that is the most plain-spoken: “They act so friendly to their neighbors, but...” To me, this complaint sounds like one that I might hear in a gossipy conversation in everyday life. It catches me off guard—it sounds a little too familiar. It makes me wonder: perhaps the hymn writer took liberties with the text? But, an older hymn setting catches me with the same surprising sense of familiarity. [In the Genevan Psalter](#), the poetic lyric written in 1551 is spelled out like this:

*To neighbors words of peace they feign
But in their hearts their misdeeds reign.*

This reminds me less of complaints I've heard from others, and leads me to think more of a confession that I need to make. It is this poetry, nearly 500 years old, which rings in my ears in a new way. Suddenly, as I remember my need for confession and see myself all through Psalm 28 (not just around the righteous edges, but also in the wicked middle), this [newer chorus by Scott Roley & Paige Overton Pitts](#) makes more sense to me as a musical version of Psalm 28:

*Hear my cry for mercy
As I call to you
As I lift my hands in Spirit
And in Truth*

*We cry mercy (in the name of the Father most Holy)
We cry mercy (in the name of the Son who was slain)
Lord have mercy (in the name of the Spirit indwelling)
Tender mercy Lord.
You are mercy (in the name of the Father most Holy)
You are mercy (in the name of the Son who was slain)
Lord have mercy (in the name of the Spirit indwelling)
Tender mercy Lord.*

What a gift to be blessed by the music and poetry of composers who have meditated on the psalms. Take a few minutes to [read Psalm 28](#) from start to finish, and let your heart sing a new song today:

*The Lord is the strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
O save your people, and bless your heritage;
be their shepherd, and carry them forever. (Psalm 28:8-9)*

Prayer: Have mercy on us, LORD. Have mercy on those who suffer, on those betrayed by neighbors and friends, and bring justice on their behalf. Reign in us with true peace, so that we show mercy and kindness to Your people everywhere.