

Psalms 31:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake.

Analysis

Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake.

Petition for God's favorable presence (shining face) and salvation grounded in divine mercy, not human merit. This encapsulates covenant theology—salvation as gift, not wage; grace, not debt.

Make thy face to shine invokes Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:25). Shining face represents God's favor, pleasure, blessing. Ancient royalty's favor meant life, promotion, protection; displeasure meant exile or death. God's face shining means He looks with approval and delight. Imperative make acknowledges this favor is God's to give or withhold—David cannot earn or demand, only request.

Upon thy servant identifies relationship. Hebrew 'ebed means servant or slave, one who belongs to another. David doesn't approach as autonomous equal but as obligated servant. Yet paradoxically, being God's servant is humanity's highest dignity. True freedom lies in serving the right Master.

Save me for thy mercies' sake provides ground of petition. David doesn't say save me because I deserve it. Basis is thy mercies (chesed, plural)—God's covenant lovingkindnesses. Phrase for thy sake emphasizes God acts for His own name's glory, not because we merit intervention. Quintessential Reformed soteriology: salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, for God's glory alone.

Historical Context

Request for God's face to shine echoes priestly blessing instituted in Numbers 6:22-27. By invoking this blessing, David claims place within covenant community. God promised to put His name on Israel and bless them; David asks God to fulfill that promise personally.

Reformers saw this as expressing sola gratia (grace alone) principle. Luther's breakthrough came when understanding righteousness from God is received by faith, not earned by works. David's appeal to God's mercies rather than own merits anticipated Reformation theology.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What is difference between asking God to save you for your sake versus for His mercies' sake?
2. How does identifying as God's servant paradoxically provide both humility and security?
3. In what areas are you tempted to approach God based on merit rather than mercy?
4. How does imagery of God's face shining comfort believers who feel they've disappointed God?
5. What does it mean practically to pray for God to act for His name's sake rather than your sake?

Interlinear Text

בְּמִסְדָּבָבָה הַוְשִׁיעַנִּי עָבֹד בְּעַל פָּנֶיךָ פָּאֵרֶה
to shine Make thy face upon thy servant save me for thy mercies
H215 H6440 H5921 H5650 H3467 H2617

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 4:6 (Parallel theme): There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

Psalms 6:4 (Salvation): Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake.

Psalms 80:3 (Salvation): Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Daniel 9:9 (Parallel theme): To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

Romans 9:15 (Parallel theme): For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Psalms 67:1 (Parallel theme): God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah.

Psalms 51:1 (Parallel theme): Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Psalms 80:7 (Salvation): Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Psalms 80:19 (Salvation): Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Psalms 30:7 (Parallel theme): LORD, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.