

PSALM 57—EXALTING GOD IN OUR TRIALS

INTRO: We all go through hard times. One of my sons posted that he went into 2023 with the idea that it would be the year of self-improvement. He started making some goals - professional and personal. He worked out regularly, was eating better, and took on more responsibility at his job. But at the end of July, he was laid off from his job with little warning and for no real reason. And then he ran a 5K in September and significantly injured his foot which made it impossible to jog and even made walking uncomfortable. Things like that don't just affect one financially or physically, but cause depression, anxiety, irritability, and make it a struggle to just keep moving.

Another friend of ours is only in her 60s but has early onset Alzheimer's. It has affected her ability to see, and now she has been moved to an assisted living facility.

A number of our friends are divorced and struggle with loneliness and the unrequited desire to have a companion of the opposite sex, but he or she just doesn't seem to be out there.

And again, we are just coming to the end of the Christmas and holiday season. There is something known as Seasonal Affective Disorder which affects many people at this time of the year and causes sadness, depression, listlessness, etc. We think of our family members who are gone, the kids who are far away, the things we shouldn't have done but did, and the things we should have done but didn't.

When we are going through hard times, we tend to focus on the bad circumstances. And we wonder, **“Is there any hope?”** This actually tends to make our symptoms worse. But there is hope and there is help.

Before he became the king of Israel, David faced terrible circumstances. He wrote Psalm 57 when his very life was in danger. He was fleeing from King Saul who was determined to kill him, and he was hiding in a cave. This psalm shows us a better way to get through our hard times—and not only get through them but see them as a positive benefit in our lives. **[READ Psalm 57]**

PROP: This psalm is telling us to put our problems in proper perspective.

O/S: We are going to walk through this psalm section-by-section and then consider how to live it out and its implications for our lives.

I. The first section is vv. 1-3, which is a prayer for God's grace and confidence of his help. In these verses, David moves from crying out to God to expressing his confidence of God's help. **[READ vv. 1-3]**

Notice in vv. 1-2, David is pleading to God. Yet he is not like so many of us or so many people we know. When bad things happen to us or to one's we love, many people think, **“How could you let this happen to me?”** And some conclude, **“I do not believe in a God who lets things like this happen.”** David is not like that. He knows God exists. He knows that, in this world, in these bodies, bad things *will* happen to us.

This is a fallen world. Physical things in the world beyond our control cause bad things to happen. Corruption in the political, social, and economic system causes bad things to happen. Beyond that, every human being—ourselves included—is sinful, self-centered, and warped. As a result, people cause bad things to happen to others, we cause bad things to happen to others, and we cause bad things to happen to ourselves. Jesus told us that, if bad things happened to him—God himself come to earth and the only pure, good, and righteous person who has ever existed—if bad things happened to him, then bad things will certainly happen to us.

What David is showing us here in vv. 1-2, is that, when bad things happen to us, we should not shake our fist at God and turn away from him. Instead, that is the very time we need to draw closer to him. When he tells us at the end of v. 1, **“In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,”** he is pointing us to what Jesus himself said in **Matt 23:37, “How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”** As David says in v. 2, we need to **“take refuge in him, until the destruction passes.”** And it *will* pass.

When we draw close to the Lord in our hard times, v. 3 tells us that “God will send forth his lovingkindness and his truth.” We can have confidence in him. We know that because, as we just saw from **Matthew 23**, Jesus *wants* us to be gathered to him under the shelter of his wings. As that great song **“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”** says, **“And in despair I bowed my head ‘There is no peace on Earth,’ I said, for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on Earth, good will to men. . . . Then rang the bells more loud and deep God is not dead, nor doth He sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on Earth, good will to men.”**

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that on Christmas Day 1863, two years after his wife had died in a fire and shortly after learning that his oldest son had be shot and severely wounded in battle and might be paralyzed. He came to the realization that, despite the nation being at war with itself and despite his own pain and grief, God is still alive, in charge, and good. We can have confidence in God because Jesus was faithful all the way to the end. He bore our sins upon himself and endured for us the ultimate punishment for our multitude of sins, so that we will not have to. Although he was killed, Jesus rose from the dead. **He is not dead, nor doth he sleep.** He hears us and will answer us.

II. The next section of this psalm is vv. 4-6. Vv. 4 and 6 set forth David’s situation and frame v. 5, which is a call for God to be exalted and glorified. **[READ vv. 4-6]**

Verse 5 is the central part of the central section of the psalm. It gives us the focus and perspective we need when facing hard times. The key here is that vv. 4 and 6 tell us that David is in the very midst of very severe trials. He is among deadly men who want him dead. He says it is like being surrounded by fire-breathing lions. His soul is bowed down.

And yet . . . and yet . . . he is not focusing, and dwelling, and ruminating on his circumstances. The key is that he is looking outside of himself and his circumstances. He is focusing and dwelling on the Lord. He is calling on the Lord to be exalted and glorified. If we do this, it will put our problems—however severe they may be—into proper perspective. We will see that there is a God, a great God, a good God, who loves us and has the whole world in his hands.

But David’s comment about the lions connects with 1 Pet 5:8-9, which says, **“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.”** Peter, again, is telling us, there is hope. We *can* resist falling into despair, even when Satan himself is attacking us—because we can resist even the devil. The apostle James puts it this way in **Jas 4:7-8, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”**

We may not understand why things are happening to us the way they are. But we are reminded that this world did not create itself. God created it. He owns it. He is sovereign and he has a plan that includes us and includes the very situation we are in. If we are faithful and turn to him—not away from him—God will be exalted and glorified by us. People will see that. The angels will see it. What is happening to us is being played out on a far bigger stage than we are able to perceive. As **Heb 12:1** reminds us **[READ Heb 12:1]**. That leads us to:

III. vv. 7-10, which is the next section of this psalm. In these verses, David is steadfast and will praise God for his lovingkindness and truth. [READ vv. 7-10]

Notice that in these verses, we see practical ways how to put our problems into proper perspective. Vv. 7-9 speak of singing and music. Verse 9 also speaks of thanking God and praising him. Singing, music, thanks, and praise. These responses are the very opposite of the way most people—and perhaps many of us—respond when we face trials and hard times.

But look at v. 10 [READ v. 10]. Verse 10 repeats and amplifies what David said in v. 3. The end of v. 3 says [READ]. Now v. 10 repeats the fact of God’s lovingkindness and truth. But it goes on to tell us that his lovingkindness **“is great to the heavens”** and his truth **“to the clouds.”** IOW, God’s lovingkindness and truth surpass anything else in the world.

We may not understand why things are happening the way they are, but that does not mean that God does not have a good reason for ordaining things to happen the way they do. I may not understand why a metal object withing over 250 tons can fly, but the airliner I get into does in fact fly. Our knowledge and our perspective are simply too small. Maybe it is inevitable, but we all tend to only look at what is right in front of our own face. Our lives revolve around us. And when bad things happen, when we are in physical, financial, or relational pain, we focus on the pain and the circumstances confronting us.

This psalm is telling us, again and again, to lift our eyes off of ourselves and our problems. Try to take it deeply into us that God is here. He is in charge. He has a plan. That plan includes us—and our circumstances. His lovingkindness is great to the heavens, and his truth to the clouds. Put our problems in perspective. When we do, we will be able to conclude as great Russian Christian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky did, **“I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for. I believe that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a mirage, like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidean mind of man. I believe that at the world’s end, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood that has been shed. I believe that it will not only be possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.”** That leads us to:

IV. v.11, the last section of this psalm. Verse 11 repeats what David said in v. 5 [READ v. 11].

He is repeating that our response to our hardships should be to exalt and glorify God. When this is our focus and perspective, everything else pales in comparison. And think about it: when we go through hard times and do *not* exalt and glorify God, what does that amount to? It amounts to facing and going through our hard times on our own—all by ourselves. That is a recipe for depression, dysfunction, and disaster.

God does not mean for us to go through life alone—especially go through hard times alone. Ps 46:1 says, **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”** He is alive. He is present, Draw on him.

V. How do we do this, and what are the implications of this for our lives?

This psalm points us to the resources we have. Our resources are far greater than what David had in order to face difficult circumstances. This psalm is pointing us to Jesus Christ who has already been gracious to us and in whom we have our refuge. vv. 1, 3, and 10 point us to what Jesus said in Heb 13:5, **“I will never leave you nor forsake you”** and what he said in Matt 28:20, **“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

The apostle Paul knew this. He lived a very hard life. Far harder than any of us have lived. Yet he was able to say, in **Phil 4:6-7**, “**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**” Be anxious for *nothing*? In the face of being beaten, and whipped, and stoned, and imprisoned, and shipwrecked, and facing hunger, and want, and slander and false charges and persecution? But in Christ Jesus he did it. And he was a person just like us. He could do this because it wasn’t his own strength. It was Christ in him who enabled him to face severe hardship with faith and even with joy. That’s why he could go on and say, “**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**”

So what are the implications of this for our lives? I see at least four implications: 1—Everything that happens to us is filtered through God’s hands. 2—Christ is with us in our suffering and distress. If you have not yet turned to him, do so. If you already have, draw on his presence and his power. He is to be exalted and glorified above everything, which means our lives should revolve around him, not ourselves. 3—He passed through the greatest distress of all—hell itself—so that: (A) we will not have to, and (B) we can trust him. 4—Whatever is happening to us he is using to mature us, and to enable us to comfort and help others who are facing hard times.

That should remind us to have a different, a broader, and a deeper, perspective on our hard times. When we focus only on ourselves and our hardships, we turn inward. In effect, we shrink ourselves. But when we get outside of ourselves and our circumstances and focus on the Lord, we exalt and glorify him. Paradoxically we then actually magnify and deepen ourselves. Getting outside of ourselves when we suffer enables us to see that we are not alone.

God an integral part of this equation. But we are not the only ones who suffer. When we stop focusing and dwelling on ourselves and our own hardship, we are now able to see that others are suffering, too. By helping them cope with their suffering, and comforting them with the comfort with which we have been comforted by God, not only will we be helping fellow sufferers, but our very act of helping others will tend to diminish our own suffering and pain—again, because we will not be dwelling on it but will have changed our focus to others. That, in turn, will exalt and glorify God, as the psalm exhorts us to do.

CONCL: We all go through hard times. The key to successfully go through hard times is to put our problems in proper perspective. Although we may feel that what is happening to us is unfair, we should remember that everything that happens to us is filtered through God’s hands. We are not alone; Christ is with us in our suffering and distress. We can trust him; he endured hell itself so that we won’t have to. That should help us to put our problems in a little better perspective, since, however bad our problems are, they are not hell and never will be.

Christ himself was “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief,” so we can expect problems in our own lives. But he said he will never leave us or forsake us. He is with us in our suffering—but not just with us; he is using our hard times to mature us and make us more like himself. The proof of that will be that we, in turn, can use our experiences to help and comfort others in their distress and hard times. And that will happen because it will be Jesus working in us, living his life out through us, and doing in and through us what we never could do on our own. In short, he will use our suffering and hard times to make us more like himself—and to become like him is the very goal of our life.