

Psalm 54

Introduction – In Job 5:7 it says that man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Life is full of trouble, and it is so full of trouble because of what we learned about the fallen and cursed nature of Man and the affect of Man's fall upon all creation (Psalm 53). Life is full of troubles, even for an anointed king, one who is a "*man after God's own heart*." This is why the Psalms are so full of laments and cries to God for help, and why we seek to recover singing the Psalms and praying like David, and his Son and LORD, Jesus. Here we learn to bring our troubles to God in prayer. Here we learn to do so with vibrant, hopeful faith in our Lord expressed in our prayers.

Setting – It wasn't a surprise to David that Doeg the Edomite betrayed him to Saul (1 Sam 22:22, and the events surrounding Psalm 52). But the superscription of Psalm 54 tells us that David finds himself rejected by men of his own tribe (1 Sam 23). David left the cave of Adullam to rescue the city of Keila from the Philistines. But afterward, David found out the men of Keilah were intending to betray him to Saul (1 Sam 23:12). David fled to the desert region of Ziph, another town of his people, from the tribe of Judah. While doing them no harm, the Ziphites tattled on David to the king as well (1 Sam 23:19-20).

The Psalm breaks easily into two parts with a Selah in between. First, in vv1-3, David prays for salvation and vindication from the murderous malice of his enemies who are set against God. Second, in vv4-7, David comforts himself with the assurance of God's favor and protection, recalling God's character, covenant Name, and His sure deliverances in times past. This is a Psalm for when you see no way of escape from your troubles.

Prayer in Troubled Times (vv1-3) – David cries out for God to save him and to do so "*by His name*." Not only does he want to be saved, he asked that his name be vindicated. David had done nothing wrong in regard to his relationship with King Saul. Remember, it was Saul, who had been told through Samuel that his reign was over and that David had been anointed king, who was pursuing David and not the other way around. He had protected the city of Keilah against the Philistines, but they were more interested in staying in the good graces of Saul. "*What cared they what innocent blood was shed so that they earned the graceless monarch's smile*" – Spurgeon. David cries out more, "*Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth*" (v2), an indication that David will not cease to bring these pleadings before the Lord. They are the ones who are the strangers (the insolent/arrogant) and Saul's men the oppressors (ruthless ones); consider what he had recently done to Ahimelech, the eighty five priests with him, and their city's women and children – 1 Sam 22:18-19).

Prayer in Our Troubled Times – We have our personal troubles. But we also have as a Christian people a corporate, national trouble in our day. The gods of secularism, Darwinism, egalitarianism, and materialism have our culture by the throat. Like David's enemies, "*they have not set God before them*" (v3). And every time a nation or a culture does not have God set before them, whether it is a Hebrew king like Saul (or compromised false teachers within the church) or our own tyrannical leaders (even if duly elected by our culture), we will find ruthless and insolent men laying claim to us, our children, our stuff, and our souls. First, we must learn to pray as David did – and then we must pray ("has it come to that?"). Second, we must learn to carefully weigh our ultimate loyalties (Micah 7:5). The closest of relational ties, friends and family, cannot be trusted when the cutting sword of gospel truth is proclaimed. When this happens, it reveals how fallen man's nature is; and when it happens on a national scale it is a sign of God's certain judgment. Christ taught that these would be the signs of coming judgment upon Jerusalem as well, but He also taught that true disciples love Him more, regardless of the cost (Matt 10:16-39). As David found out, we too must come to see that there are no more safe spaces where we can quietly settle down and mind our own business. There will be a fight. And so we pray, "*O Lord, deliver our people; save our nation, and do it by means of Your name*" (54:1 applied).

Hope in Troubled Times (vv4-7) – We must not only pray as David prays, we must pray with the hope that David prays. Who is our God? What is His name? He is *Elohim* (vv1-4), the Creator God, creator of all things, Who's fingers set the moon and stars in their place (Psalm 8:3, Job 38:4-7). He is *Adonai* (v4b) because He is the ruler of all His creation (Psalm 103:19, Isaiah 45:7-9, Eph 1:11, Col 1:15-17, Job 42:2). And He is *LORD* (*Yahweh*, v6), because He is a covenant-keeping God, loyal to His people with tender mercies (Deut 7:9, 1 Cor 1:9, 2 Thess 3:3, John 3:16).

David prays with hope. He knows God is his helper and is with those who help him (v4). In 1 Sam 23, God sent help through Jonathan's loyal and encouraging words (vv16-18), and through His Providence, the Philistines attacked and caused Saul to leave David alone for a time (vv27-29). This kind of faith in God in the midst of troubles is itself a gift from the Helper; faith is the gift of God (Eph 2:8, Heb 11:1). In addition, David could pray for God to avenge and vindicate him and could wait for God to do so (v5). Twice, David was given the opportunity to kill Saul himself but refused to do so. He would not take revenge; he trusted God to do so, as should we (Rom 12:19-21). David is not being vindictive. This is not a prayer of malice, but of faith. David is taking his case before the great Judge as a plaintiff, seeking redress for wrongs suffered and for righteousness to flood the land.

This hope, produced by faith in God, a faith from God, erupts in confident and joyful praise (vv6-7), which is another reason we should want to learn to pray like David. This praise can be given before the deliverance has come when God has granted such faith. That kind of praise overflows and is contagious. *"It is of great use to our souls to be much in praise; we are never so holy or so happy as when our adoration of God abounds. Praise is good in itself, good to us, and good to all around us"* – Spurgeon. When we sing with such faith and hope, we admonish one another with great encouragement (Col 3:16).

I want this confidence: *"He has delivered me out of all trouble..."* so why should He not again? As you list the troubles you are in right now (which we so easily do), do not forget to list all of the troubles He has delivered you from (which we so quickly forget to do), especially your salvation from your well deserved eternal damnation.

Christ in Troubled Times – Remember to always look for Christ in the Psalms. Only when we see Christ in the Psalms will we rightly see ourselves in the Psalms as well, for we must learn to see ourselves in Christ. And here He is, the Psalm-Singer, betrayed by His own, seeking vindication from the Father, and placing His hope in the character and covenant of God. Consider how accurately this Psalm depicts the entire life of Jesus, especially when he faced the suffering of the cross. God calls His people to trust Him and promises to be faithful as a Savior. In the fulness of time, God's covenant came to fulfillment in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be Lord of the covenant and Savior of His people.

Life is full of troubles. Life's troubles did not go away for God's anointed, whether for David or for the Greater David's Son. Your life here will not cease from troubles. Do you know their God? Do you know Christ's Father? He would be glad to introduce you. There, and only there, you will find rest from all your troubles, salvation from your enemies, vindication of your name as a son of the Most High, and hope that carries you through with glad-hearted praise (Rom 5:3-5).

Dave Hatcher – November 26, 2023