

# Psalm 55

**Introduction** – We have been progressing through a series of Psalms that present David's response to betrayal. There was Doeg, the Edomite (Psalm 52) and the Ziphites, fellow Judeans (Psalm 54). Psalm 55 responds to the most painful betrayal since it came from a "companion" who "took sweet counsel together" with David (55:13), and David seems to stagger under this blow. He will complain to God, and there is a vast difference between complaining *about God*, which is terrible, and complaining *to God*, which He welcomes (Wilson). And so, this is a great song to sing when we are under a great burden, for it was the song David sang under his great burden. Our goal should be to learn how to offer prayers that cannot be refused. And we are to learn to properly obey God's command to cast our burdens upon Him. Jesus is in this Psalm as well, and we remember that His betrayer, Judas, was one of His inner circle. Jesus cast His cares upon His Father despite the acts of His traitor and the enemies who arrested, tried and crucified Him. Take your genuine, often deeply personal, and devastating burdens, and cast them upon the Lord.

**David's Genuine Burden** (vv1-11) – Unlike Psalm 52 and 54, we are not told the specifics of this Psalm, but from the sound of it, it may have been during the revolt of Absalom, and the betrayal of Ahithophel (2 Sam 15-18). He begins by pleading with God to hear him, as if God had forsaken him; David feels alone (vv1-2, Psalm 22:1). His complaint is against the slanders and oppression of a wicked bunch (v3). He is truly overwhelmed with horror, the threat of his demise is before him and he is in agony with fearfulness and trembling (vv4-5). If there was any way to escape it all, he would (vv6-7), and Selah (through v8).

This was the state of mind of David as he escaped Jerusalem, going over the Brook Kidron and up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went (2 Sam 15:23, 30). The Son of David went as well with great agony over the same path (Mark 14:26, 33-34) where He found His soul "exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." The Lord Jesus sweat drops of blood in His anguish (Luke 22:44). David wished he could fly away and Jesus prayed, "O Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matt 26:39). Jesus faced His burden, even the effective work of His traitor, with strong crying and tears – in His obedience (Heb 5:7-8). Both David and Jesus faced genuine, devastating burdens. We learn something about courage here. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is doing what you are required to do despite your fears. It is not inconsistent for a true and living faith to break down in fear before great dangers, terrible burdens. But that faith points you in a particular direction in the midst of the fear.

The city had been given over to violence and strife (v9b) with 24/7 iniquities all around it and all within (v10). Oppression and deceit were bringing it to certain destruction (v11). Absalom had stole the hearts of the men of Israel (2 Sam 15:6), and his conspiracy grew strong, continually increasing in number (2 Sam 15:12). Evil had taken root in the city. And so, David prays, "Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues" (55:9), remembering how God dealt with Babel, another arrogant city building its own way to God, asking God to confuse their speech and divide them which so often (and mercifully) happens among evildoers. "We would be many times worse off if evil people could actually get their acts together and work in harmony against the righteous instead of fighting among themselves, as they habitually do" – Boice.

**A Grievous, Personal Burden** (vv12-15) – It is not just the city in general. Worse, it is his own companion (possibly Ahithophel, a dear counselor to David) who has joined with the rebellious leader (Absalom). Here is the source of the deepest sorrow for David. "The poetic fury is on him, he sees the traitor as though he stood before him in flesh and blood. He singles him out, he points his finger at him, he challenges him to his face..." (Spurgeon). Like Julius Caesar, "Et tu, Brute?"

But turning back to the wicked rebellious city in general, David cries out for their utter destruction (v15). This is imprecatory language which is remarkably common in the Psalms. It is important to distinguish between the prayer for the judgment of God upon wicked men from a sinful spirit of revenge. It is right for God to overthrow the wicked, and thus appropriate for God's people to pray in such terms. David is recalling another throwback, this time to the destruction of Korah and his followers in the days of Moses when the ground under them split apart and swallowed them (Num 16:31-33). Jesus also prophesied a great destruction upon the Temple in His generation (Mark 13:2, 30).

**Running to God with Your Burden** (vv16-21) – David is running from the city and driven to the Lord in prayer. And in driving God's servant to prayer, the enemy has over-reached himself. This is the turning point of the Psalm (vv16-18). "Prayer is the believer's universal medicine for all the disorders of the soul within, and his invincible shield against every enemy that can attack him from without" – Horne. It is the Christian's superpower. We must learn to wield this weapon. David and later, Daniel, are similar in adopting disciplined countermeasures against pressure from the world (Dan 6:10). This is not a token prayer at the beginning of the day just to say you did (and again consider vv1-2). Prayer is David's strategy; it is his great hope, "He shall hear my voice." Every time the fear comes, every

time he is overwhelmed, every time his mind is overrun with anxiety, the answer is that he will pray. He will pray until his soul is redeemed in peace from the battle (v18).

God does not only hear David, He also hears the voice of the slanderers, filled with malice and pride in their rebellion against His anointed (v19). Their noise reaches to heaven as well, and *"God will hear and afflict them."* Their buttery words of flattery do not hide the war against God in their heart; He is not fooled (vv20-21). David's prayer was answered. Absalom was hanged without a rope, and Ahithophel (and Judas in Jesus' day) was hanged with one. *"The eternal God is your refuge, And underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, And will say, 'Destroy'"* (Deut 33:27).

**Cast Your Burden** (vv22-23) – David instructs us with the end of the matter, the application is written large here. We are all called on to cast our burden on the Lord. If God can handle David's burden, how much more can He *"sustain you"* in yours? If God can take the burden of Christ and use it to save the world (Acts 4:27-28), how much more can He make that kink in your story turn out to be the perfect plot, the black swan, in The Story.

"Cast" is translated throughout the OT, *"cast out," "cast off," "cast down," "hurl,"* and *"cast lots"* which is particularly interesting as the word *"burden"* means *"the lot which is given."* You are being commanded to cast that lot which God has given you upon Him. *"Here, you take it God."* Consider the old hymn, *"Whate'er my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well with my soul.'"* And in great contrast, the lot for the one who trusts God is distinctively different than the lot for the one who betrays God (v23).

Peter will use this idea as he addresses saints under many trials and persecutions (1 Pet 5:6-7). And Paul will use this idea to show us the way of peace amid any anxiety (Phil 4:6-7). Can God sustain you in your trial? Not only so, He provides the way of escape (1 Cor 10:13). Give the entire messy affair of your life to God in prayer for *He will redeem your soul in peace* (v18). What is that unique, genuine, personal, devastating lot in your life? An illness? A disability? A relational dilemma? A financial nightmare? A recurring temptation? What is your lot? "Hurl" it on the Lord.

---

Dave Hatcher – December 3, 2023