

Psalm 56

Introduction – This is another Psalm dealing with David's early trials with Saul. We are told this Psalm is inspired when David fled to Gath, the hometown of Goliath, while Saul was pursuing him, only to find his life in peril with the Philistines (1 Sam 21:10-12), he was "...very much afraid of Achish, the king of Gath." More troubles and more to fear. But this Psalm emphasized what we are to do with our fears amidst the troubles. Sometimes it is not the troubles themselves that are so disabling; it is the fear that comes in the face of the troubles. Fear is a powerful motivator. Fear often keeps a person from acting in the most normal and rational manner. Often, fear causes a person to act totally irrationally. Those in positions of power (whether in the family, the church, or in civil government) know that fear is a great manipulator and tool for control. The Psalm-singer deals directly with the issue of handling fear.

Fighting Fear with Faith (vv1-4) – David sings for mercy amidst the unrelenting fury of his oppressors (vv1-2, and verse 2 might better end in translation with, "...many are attacking me from on high"). By fleeing to Gath, David jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. The details of their pursuit are vague, but this only makes these verses more generally applicable to us all. *"The same words are applicable to the situation and circumstances of David, pursued by his enemies; of Christ, persecuted by the Jews; of the church, afflicted in the world; and of the soul, encompassed by enemies, against whom she is forced to wage perpetual war"* – Horne.

Whenever I Am Afraid - David is not afraid to admit he is afraid (v3). He is no Stoic and no fatalist. He genuinely fears for his life. Fear is an emotion in the midst of circumstances, real, imagined, in the present, or expected future. Faith (or trust) is a disciplined reflex of the will, a deliberate act in defiance of the emotions. This kind of trust is not simply a belief in theological doctrines about God, but a personal turning to a God one finds to be a trustworthy source of protection and blessing. Imagine David writing this Psalm with Goliath's sword lying at his side. He remembers how God so faithfully granted him the confidence in another fearful situation (1 Sam 17:45-47). In our day, we live in a world that refuses to discipline emotions. Is it any wonder we are so often lost in our fears? Having surrendered to "how I feel" because that defines my true identity, we find we have lost our sanity and our humanity.

I Will Trust in You – Discipline your emotions. Do so every time and for every anxiety you ever have (1 Pet 5:7). We are to praise God and we are to praise His Word which declares Who He is, who we are, and how we are to live. Notice, this is not something you do when the fear goes away – it is something to do to drive the fear away (v4). *"It was no small attainment in David, that he could thus proceed to praise the Lord in the midst of dangers, and with no other ground of support but the Word of God"* – Calvin.

The Malice of Men and the Tendermercies of God (vv5-11) – Yet (in this Psalm) the enemies have not yet been put down and so, in that trust, the Psalm-singer continues his complaint to the Lord (vv5-6). Twisting words out of context is not something that only began in the days of the internet (v5). These enemies look to entangle David in his own words. They gather together and conspire. They hide and wait for just the right moment to spring upon their victim (v6). This was the same story with Jesus (Luke 11:53-54, 20:20), as it is always when there are disreputable power-seekers and malicious men. David then argues to God with a rhetorical question and a request in accordance with the character of God (v7). What comes of faithful meditation on the character of God is confident and powerful prayers. And now, David reflects on that character.

How does God think upon His chosen ones (v8)? God knows every hair on your head (Matt 10:30). This doesn't mean He is good at math. It means that He cares for every little detail in your life; He numbers each one of your wanderings (trials). Not only will He one day wipe away every tear (Rev 7:17, 21:4) but He is carefully counting each one *"...as men count their gold, for even the trial of our faith is precious in His sight...How condescending is the Lord! How exact His knowledge of us! How generous His estimation! How tender His regard!"* – Spurgeon. With that confidence in who God is, the Psalm-singer knows God will answer his prayers (v9). Again, Spurgeon, *"The machinery of prayer is not always visible, but it is most efficient...who will restrain prayer when it is so potent."* And Calvin, who had his share of woes, trials, and great enemies, commented on this verse, *"Though God might make no haste to interpose, and might not scatter his enemies at the very instant when he prayed, he was confident that his prayers would not be disappointed: and his ground for believing this was just a conviction of the truth, that God never frustrates the prayers of his own children."*

"This I Know, for God is for Me" – See to it that we learn to meditate on God's Word and sing like David and like Jesus, for these are His songs. This is how we kill fear, anxiety, worry, and doubt. David is so sure that God is for him that he sings this reprise again (vv10-11) as does Paul (Rom 8:31-39, Heb 13:6). FDR famously said, *"We have nothing to fear but fear itself,"* which isn't quite right. It might better be said *"we must fear nothing but God Himself"* (Luke 12:4-5).

From Fear to Faith to Unbridled Praise (vv12-13) – When God gets a hold of you in this way, this kind of faith overflows into praise, binding vows of thanksgiving offerings upon our hearts. We become a people who cannot wait to join with the saints to give God the praise due His name. The Psalmist says that God has delivered our soul from death and this is true for every Christian (John 11:25-26); there remains no lasting sting in death (1 Cor 15:54-56). We are privileged to have a taste of this in little deliverances He gives now, and in the grace He gives always to persevere in the troubles and yet without fear (2 Cor 12:9). This all happens by means of looking to Christ. We are to praise God's Word, and Jesus is the Word. Christ is our promise for in Him death has been put to death. Christ is our grace for, and take this very personally, *"He cares for you; He is for you."*

Dave Hatcher – December 31, 2023