

Psalm 59

Introduction – Here we are with another Psalm on troubles. In fact, Psalm 59 and 60 will deal with the bookends of David's troubles. Psalm 59 is ascribed to an episode early on in David's public life. Psalm 60 deals with an event long into David's reign. Of this longer collection of Psalms we have recently studied, Spurgeon writes, *"Strange that the painful events in David's life should end in enriching the repertoire of the national minstrelsy. Out of a sour, ungenerous soil spring up the honey-bearing flowers of psalmody...The music of the sanctuary is no small degree indebted to the trials of the saints. Affliction is the tuner of the harps of sanctified songsters."* So, this Psalm will take us down familiar paths and deepen the comfort (and even delight) we are to have in our particular troubles.

Overview and Background – This Psalm easily breaks down into four sections. Verses 1-7 record David's pleas for help and sets forth his woes. In vv 8-10, the Psalm-singer declares his confidence in the One he pleads to. Verses 11-15 returns to his petitions, again declaring his enemies to be prowling about him like an angry pack of wild dogs. But he returns and ends with a song of praise over God's power and mercy (vv16-17). He knows Whom he has believed but cannot simply rest in that. He must sing about Him and to Him.

The context, according to the inscription, is the time when Saul's men surrounded David's house. Out of envy, Saul wanted David killed. Saul had lost his anointing of kingship due to his disobedience to God's command to kill Agag and all of the Amalekites (1 Sam 15). David is privately anointed as the new king by Samuel (1 Sam 16:1-3). Meanwhile, the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him and David is sent to provide musical comfort that would cause the spirit to depart (1 Sam 16:14ff). Next, in chapter 17, David approached Saul to fight the Philistine giant, and David on that day killed Goliath and also won a great victory for the children of Israel. Saul set David over his army and David was very successful, so much so that a song about him was sung throughout the cities of Israel, *"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands"* (1 Sam 18:7). Several other events occurred that caused Saul to hate David and be afraid of him (1 Sam 18:28-29). One evening, the distressing spirit came over Saul and he tried to pin David to the wall, throwing his spear at him, but David escaped (19:1-10). Which leads us to the event that apparently inspired this Psalm (Read 1 Sam 19:11-18). David has done nothing wrong. He is really a rather innocent figure in the midst of a greater narrative. Despite doing his best for the king, he finds himself trapped in his own house with the king out to kill him. It's an unfair and difficult situation – maybe you have found yourself in one a time or two.

I imagine Michal, David's wife, saying, *"If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed"* and David replying, *"You are right. I need to get out of here. But hang on, I have to finish this Psalm."* And this is only a half-joke. We learn how important it is to pray in times of distress and to sing with confident joy in those times as well. We need to be formed by these psalms.

Telling God What's Wrong (1-4a) – As we dive into the Psalm itself, George Horne, the puritan, writes, *"In these words we hear the voice of David, when a prisoner in his own house; the voice of Christ, when surrounded by his merciless enemies; the voice of the church, when under bondage in the world; and the voice of the Christian, when under temptation, affliction, and persecution."* In all of these different circumstances, we are to first turn to the Lord. Deliverance and defense come from Him and so we plead to Him (vv1-2). If something is wrong, tell God. It is true that chastisements come to us because of our sin. But many times, we find ourselves accused or in trouble through no fault of our own (vv3-4a, Prov 12:6, John 15:24-25, Psalm 2:2, Acts 23:21).

Telling God What to Do (4b-7) – We are to cry "Awake," because sometimes it seems as though God is asleep, missing what is going on. They were "running" and "preparing" (v4a) and so David cries out "Awake...behold!" (v4b). He tells them not to have any mercy upon them in their wicked transgressing (v5 - in the context of David, they are trying to kill the newly anointed king), for they arrogantly prowl the streets like scavenger dogs, or in our modern day, like gangs flagrantly discarding the laws, belching with their mouths, doing whatever they please with an attitude that God doesn't hear or see (vv6-7). But wait. They weren't gangs. They were men connected to the established government and proper authorities, probably wearing black jackets with big official letters on them.

Declaring to God What You Know of Him (8-10) – How does one build up one's confidence in such a time of terror? David writes and sings vv8-10. He knows the LORD laughs at them and holds them in derision (and so another obvious hat tip to Jesus, the antitype of David – Psalm 2:2, Acts 4:25-31, *"...and they spoke the Word of God with boldness"*). Lady Wisdom speaks to those with the same confidence (Prov 1:20-27), as do the prophets (i.e. Hab 3:19).

We are to pray with such confidence as we finish the Lord's Prayer: *"Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever"* (Matt 6:13), and even more since Jesus has come, full of mercy for us regarding our most deadly foe – our own sinfulness (Eph 2:4-5). Because Who is this God we pray to? Consider His names and character just in this Psalm: He is God who can defend and deliver (vv1-2). He is Yahweh, our personal covenant God of grace (v3, 5, 7). He is the God of armies (v5). He is the God of Israel, our people (v5). He is our Strength (v9), our Defense/Fortress (v9), full of mercy (v10), powerful to scatter (v11), and our Personal Shield (v11). He is able to consume the enemies in His wrath (v13) and he rules over Jacob and to the ends of the earth (v13).

Directing God's Judgments (11-15) – Verse 11 begins, “*Do not slay them, lest my people forget...*” and commentators wonder. And yet, because God answered this prayer, there was a long period of David getting into trouble and then God delivering him from Saul time and again, the writing of more and more Psalms, and we are less likely to forget all of David's struggles until God finally consumed Saul in his wrath (v13) and all knew “*that God rules in Jacob and to the ends of the earth.*” Might we forget God and think arrogantly of ourselves if we never had to turn to him in times of trouble? There will come a day when every tear is wiped away and every trial is departed. Until then, we are to learn wisdom and more about God, and ourselves, in the midst of ongoing trials (James 1:2-3).

Men who sin with their words and curse with their lips, are full of pride (v12). Blasphemy and lying go together. “*He who is not ashamed to curse before God, will be sure to lie unto men*” – Spurgeon. Returning to the image of scavenger dogs, David describes why they need to be put down – they are not getting better but worse. Each evening they return for more; they are never satisfied with their self-serving deeds and violence. And we see this with the wicked today in cultural issues. First it is a request for open dialogue, then a protest for legal acceptance, and finally a requirement that we give our approval. It is right to pray/sing, “*Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be.*”

Praising with Song God's Powerful Mercy (16-17) – The wicked are always unsatisfied, but we are to relish in our position that is ours in Christ, seated with Him in His unbroken reign (Eph 2:6). Anyone can be happy when times are good, but it is the mark of faith in Christ that we can rejoice when times are still bad or look uncertain. This is not because we are stoics or refuse to face reality. We rejoice because we remember God's faithful salvation in times past (all of David's stories, all of the apostles' stories, all of your stories – do you remember?). Trusting in Who He is and What He has promised, we learn to watch and sing in such a way that our hearts are encouraged and our attitudes lifted into joy.

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